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MassINC is an independent think tank using nonpartisan research, civic journalism, and public forums to stimulate debate and shape public policy. Our mission is to promote a public agenda for the middle class and to help all citizens achieve the American Dream.

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The MassINC Polling Group is an independent, nonpartisan full-service polling organization providing public opinion research and analysis to public, private, and social-sector clients.

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When MassINC and The MassINC Polling Group collaborate on research projects, The MassINC Polling Group is contracted to design the survey instrument, perform data collection, and provide results. Working together, MassINC and The MassINC Polling Group interpret findings and present them in a report. While this report is authored by both MassINC and The MassINC Polling Group, recommendations presented represent the views of MassINC exclusively.

ABOUT THE MASSACHUSETTS CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM COALITION

The Massachusetts Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, formed in 2012, is a diverse group of prosecutors and corrections practitioners, defense lawyers, community organizers, and businessmen and women who find common ground in the need for corrections reform in Massachusetts. The Coalition co-chairs are: Wayne Budd, former U.S. Attorney; Kevin Burke, former Secretary of Public Safety; and Max Stern, President of the Massachusetts Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. The Coalition's purpose is to work with lawmakers to make major changes in the criminal justice system in Massachusetts, including:

- Placing a moratorium on new prison construction
- Reestablishing and empowering the state's Sentencing Commission
- Building a statewide reentry initiative modeled after Boston's Emergency Reentry program
- Redirecting resources from the most costly settings to pre-release and drug programming
- Developing clear lines of responsibility for post-release supervision

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Cover image: The cover word cloud, drawn from the transcripts of the four focus groups for the project, was generated using tagxedo.com

Ready for Reform?

Public Opinion on Criminal Justice in Massachusetts

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April 2014

MassINC
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POLLING GROUP

**Massachusetts Criminal
Justice Reform Coalition**

April 2014

Dear Friends:

MassINC and the Massachusetts Criminal Justice Reform Coalition are proud to present *Ready for Reform? Public Opinion on Criminal Justice in Massachusetts*. We are confident that it will stand as a landmark piece of research on this topic, and we hope it will advance the debate on making changes in this area of public policy.

This report is the end product of an extensive public opinion research project conducted by the non-partisan MassINC Polling Group (MPG). Through four online focus groups and a statewide telephone poll, MPG sought to better understand Massachusetts residents' attitudes and opinions on criminal justice: how the system is doing now, what it should be doing better, and what should be changed to get there.

The research was designed to capture opinion statewide as well as in the handful of urban communities most impacted by crime and the criminal justice system. Care was also taken to allow for comparisons with previous research here in Massachusetts, as well as with more recent national surveys which have shown support for reform.

We found that the national support for reforming the system also holds here. Massachusetts residents want a criminal justice system that is effective at reducing crime through prevention and rehabilitation. To get there, residents think many of the reforms adopted elsewhere would be effective, from job training and other reentry support to treatment for drug addiction and mental illness. They think there are too many inmates in prison, and that time in prison is actually contributing to recidivism. They strongly prefer some judicial discretion in sentencing rather than mandatory minimums.

These attitudes are consistent with national opinion, and they also mark a shift over time. In 1997, when MassINC last polled these issues, two-thirds favored building a new 1,000-bed prison in Massachusetts. Today, two-thirds favor reforms that would send fewer people to prison in the first place.

We first presented a summary of these findings at an event last month with Gov. Deval Patrick, where he laid out a 5-year plan to reduce recidivism alongside a series of other reforms. Many of the policies in his plan are similar to what we tested in this research, and, based on our findings, the public appears to be with the Governor on this issue.

And so is the Coalition. We look forward to supporting the Governor's plan and other similar reforms by sharing this public opinion research with stakeholders and policymakers in the months to come.

Sincerely,

Greg Torres

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Ready for Reform?

Public Opinion on Criminal Justice in Massachusetts

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	5
I. Introduction.	9
II. Views of the Current System	10
III. Pursuing Reform	15
IV. Conclusion.	21
Survey Methodology	22
Poll Topline Results	23
Endnotes.	31

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

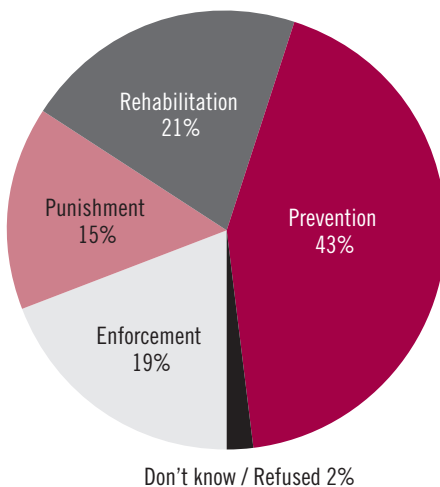
Massachusetts residents are ready to reform the state's criminal justice system with an eye towards reducing crime through prevention and rehabilitation. The public has shifted from a harder line adopted during the tough-on-crime era of the 1990s and is now open to a different approach. The bottom line for residents is creating a system that is effective at reducing crime.

These are the major findings of our new research project looking at public opinion on criminal justice in the Commonwealth. The project was commissioned by MassINC and the Massachusetts Criminal Justice Reform Coalition as a follow-up to MassINC's 2013 report *Crime, Cost, and Consequences: Is It Time to Get Smart on Crime?* It comprised four focus groups and a statewide poll of 1,207 residents. Here are some of the key findings:

Figure ES1:

Residents want to prioritize prevention, rehabilitation

Q: Which do you think should be a top priority for dealing with crime?



Massachusetts residents want the criminal justice system to focus on prevention and rehabilitation—two areas where the current system is not seen as effective.

- Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) think the criminal justice system should prioritize crime prevention or rehabilitation (Figure ES1). This and other findings are largely consistent with national and state polls by the Pew Center for the States, in which majorities favored shifting resources from incarceration towards alternatives.¹
- Majorities of Massachusetts residents think the current system is effective at punishing the guilty (64 percent) and ensuring fair trials (73 percent). On other priorities like rehabilitation and prevention of future crime, effectiveness ratings were considerably lower. The lowest effectiveness ratings went to rehabilitating prisoners addicted to drugs or alcohol (37 percent) and addressing the needs of mentally ill prisoners (37 percent).
- Some parts of the system are seen as counterproductive. Most (59 percent) think released inmates are *more likely* to reoffend due to being hardened in prison, and 57 percent think inmates reoffend because they lack opportunities and resources upon release.

Two-thirds want reforms that result in fewer people sent to prison, reversing previous high levels of support for new prisons.

- In a 1997 MassINC poll, two-thirds supported building a new, 1,000-bed prison. Now, two-thirds (67 percent) would prefer to reform the system so that fewer people are sent to prison.
- Proposals focused on reducing the number of people sent to prison and improving post-release prospects among current inmates receive widespread support (Figure ES2).
- Overall, 85 percent support (52 percent strongly) a reform agenda that includes a focus on reha-

Figure ES2:

Reentry help, supervision, treatment all seen as effective at reducing crime

Q: For each of the following, please tell me how effective, if at all, you think that it is or would be in substantially reducing crime?

	% VERY EFFECTIVE	% TOTAL EFFECTIVE
Send non-violent, mentally ill people to treatment rather than to prison to keep them separated from hardened criminals	61%	90%
Provide prisoners with job training so they can find work after they are released	59%	88%
Require prisoners who are about to be released to connect with community groups that can help them after their release	53%	89%
Require a period of supervision for all prisoners following their release	52%	86%
Send drug users to treatment rather than prison to keep them separated from hardened criminals	47%	83%
Doing more to prepare inmates for release from prison by gradually moving them to a lower security level in prison, to work-release programs, to halfway houses and the like	47%	87%
Sending only those convicted of violent crimes and dealers of hard drugs to prison, and sentencing those convicted of lesser crimes to probation under close monitoring and control	35%	77%
Getting rid of things like television sets and gyms for prisoners, and concentrating on punishing them for their crimes	23%	42%
Require all prisoners to serve out their entire sentence with no chance of early release	21%	45%

bilitation, increased use of probation, reduced sentences for non-violent criminals and drug users, and judicial discretion instead of mandatory minimum sentencing. Support for these reforms rises to 91 percent (65 percent strongly) when residents learn that other states have lowered crime with similar reforms.

Residents show little support for mandatory minimum sentencing.

- Only 11 percent favor mandatory minimum sentences when presented with three options (Figure ES2). Far more prefer judges either use sentencing guidelines (44 percent) or determine sentences on a case-by-case basis (41 percent).
- This marks a clear departure from MassINC’s 1997 poll, when large majorities viewed a

variety of mandatory sentences as effective in reducing crime.²

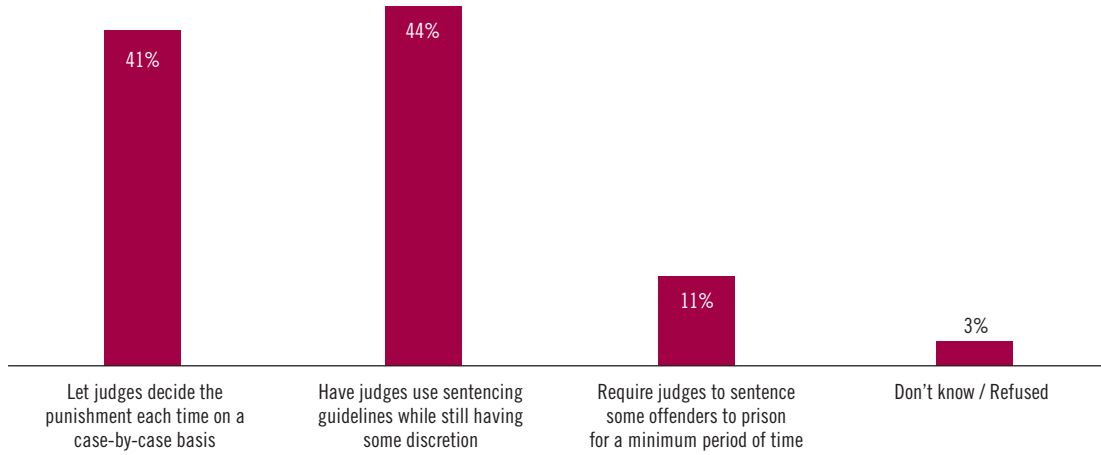
The public views drug use as a health problem rather than a crime, and favors rehabilitation over incarceration.

- More than twice as many (64 percent) perceive drug use as a health problem than a crime (24 percent).
- More than four in five (83 percent) think sending drug users to treatment instead of prison would be effective in reducing crime. Drug trafficking is still viewed as a more serious offense, and far fewer would support leniency for those involved.

Figure ES3:

Preferred sentencing practice?

Q: Which is the best way for judges to sentence convicted offenders?



Concerns about supervision cloud picture of public support.

- The focus groups conducted in preparation for the poll found residents do not believe the supervision system is effective right now. Participants were sensitive to overworked supervision staff, and questioned whether they could keep up with higher demands stemming from reforms that sent more inmates into supervised release situations.
- Just 41 percent are aware that many inmates are released without any supervision at all. In fact, nearly half (48 percent) of inmates released from Department of Correction (DOC) facilities in 2011 received no post-release supervision.

In communities that receive a very large share of released inmates, residents agree with the broad, pro-reform sentiment of the rest of the state.

- Because reform will disproportionately impact the ten communities where 49 percent of DOC releases take place, these areas were oversampled to examine residents' opinions on these issues closely.
- While some responses varied by a few percentage points, there were no sharp departures or reversals of opinion between these ten communities and the rest of the state. Generally speaking, residents from high-release areas support the overall reform agenda and see the potential benefit of the specific reforms included in the poll.

I. INTRODUCTION

MassINC's 2013 report, *Crime, Cost, and Consequences*, laid out a stark case for reforming the Massachusetts criminal justice system—a system that is incarcerating prisoners for longer periods but not reducing crime or rehabilitating inmates in a cost-effective manner. As a result of tough-on-crime policies which were enacted in the 1980s and 1990s, the share of the state's population in prison has tripled over the past 30 years.³

Those in prison remain confined longer, on average, and a larger share of them are held in higher-security facilities, all at a higher cost to the Commonwealth. Much of this increase has been driven by the use of mandatory minimum sentencing, a policy which has had the unintended consequence of limiting inmates' eligibility for parole, their incentive to rehabilitate in prison, and their supervision upon release.

Beginning in the late 1990s, criminologists, and then legislatures in many states, began to shift away from the tough-on-crime approach in favor of evidence-based reforms—policies backed by data showing that they can reduce crime while saving taxpayers money. These reforms focus on reducing the number of inmates in prisons, redirecting resources into alternatives like treatment for drug users, improved use of probation and parole supervision, and reentry programs aimed at easing the transition from prison back to society to reduce recidivism among released inmates.

As the MassINC report details, this approach, called Justice Reinvestment, has been adopted across the nation, including in conservative-leaning states like South Carolina, Texas, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Georgia. Many of these states have seen their crime rates, prison populations, and criminal justice costs all drop since adopting reform. As the MassINC report detailed, Massachusetts, under Governors Romney and Patrick, has advanced some elements of a Justice Reinvestment agenda. But for the most part Massachu-

setts, traditionally a policy leader among states, is behind the curve on criminal justice reform.

Expert opinion has changed on criminal justice issues, but what about public opinion in Massachusetts? To find out, MassINC commissioned the non-partisan MassINC Polling Group to conduct a public opinion research project on criminal justice issues. The project comprised four online focus groups and a statewide poll of 1,207 residents. Because crime and changes to the criminal justice system disproportionately impact a relatively small number of urban areas in the Commonwealth, the project was designed to allow for an in-depth analysis of opinion from those areas. Several questions were repeated from Massachusetts polls from past decades and from recent national surveys on criminal justice, so as to track how opinion has shifted over time and how it compares to attitudes beyond Massachusetts.

THE MASSACHUSETTS PUBLIC APPEARS READY TO REFORM THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.

In short, the Massachusetts public appears ready to reform the criminal justice system. As described in further detail below, residents think the current system is effective in some areas, but not the ones they would prefer to see given top priority. In some cases, the public thinks that current system is actually counterproductive and contributing to recidivism. Opinion has shifted against tough-on-crime tactics and towards increased use of alternatives to incarceration.

When asked to rate potential reforms, residents reject the approach of past decades in favor of policies aimed easing reentry and rehabilitating inmates. In this regard, public opinion has shifted significantly from 1997, when MassINC last polled on these issues, and it is now in line with recent national polling.

II. VIEWS OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM

Overall, the public views the current system as effective at punishing and trying criminals, but little else. The public thinks too many are being incarcerated, and that their time in prison actually contributes to their chances of reoffending upon release. Very few favor mandatory minimums as a way to sentence inmates. And most residents think drug use should be treated more as a health problem than as a crime.

The public views the criminal justice system as ineffective at many priorities.

Majorities felt the current system was effective at only two tasks: punishing criminals (64 percent) and ensuring that defendants receive fair trials (73 percent). Opinion ranged from mixed to negative on all the other priorities tested (Figure 1). The system received the lowest marks for preparing prisoners for release, rehabilitating young prisoners, and dealing with mental illness and drug addiction.

The public thinks too many are incarcerated and favors reform over building more prisons.

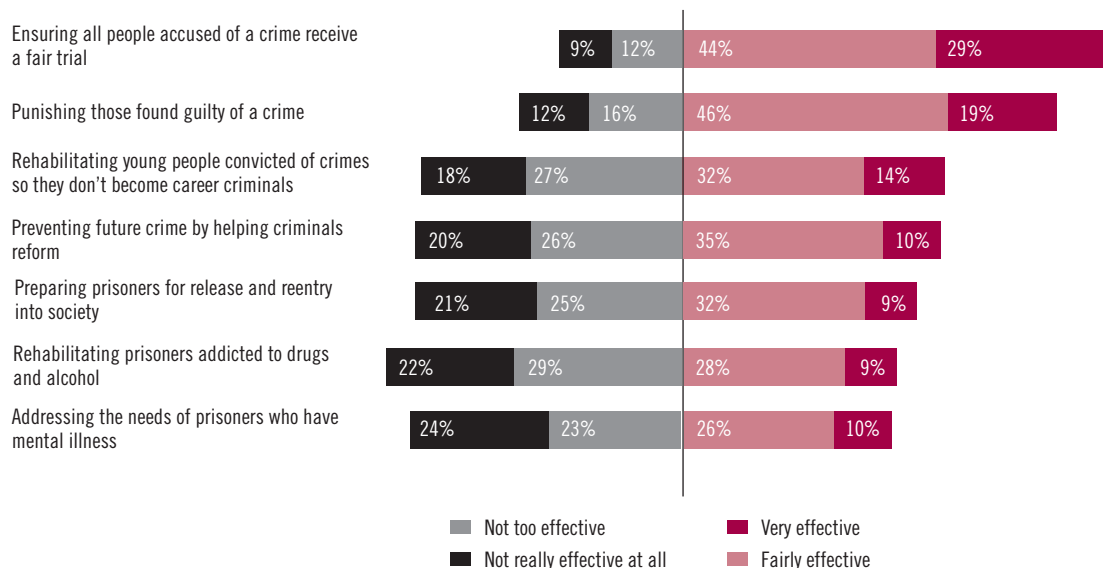
Digging further into specific issues sheds more light on the public’s dissatisfaction with the status quo. One issue cited in the MassINC report is the escalating prison population in Massachusetts. Since the early 1980s, the percentage of the state’s population confined in a state prison or jail has tripled. The public perceives this to be a problem, with a plurality (40 percent) thinking that too many people are in prison in the Commonwealth. Opinion on this issue is very consistent with that found in a national poll conducted for the Pew Center for the States in 2012, and with the focus groups.⁴ “There are too many prisons and they are overcrowded,” said one focus group participant. “Reduce the number of prisoners!” was another’s response.

When asked how to address the growing prison population, two-thirds (67 percent) would prefer to “reform the system so that fewer people

Figure 1:

Current system seen as effective at punishment, fair trials — but little else

Q: Overall, how effective is the criminal justice system in Massachusetts at each of the following?



are sent to prison,” rather than build more prisons (26 percent; Figure 2). This was echoed in the focus groups, where one respondent said, “Building more prisons is definitely not the answer.” Massachusetts opinion is again consistent with the Pew poll, in which 69 percent favored alternatives to prison for non-violent offenders to reduce the prison population and the crime rate.

It is also a sharp departure from MassINC’s 1997 poll on criminal justice.⁵ Then, a large majority (83 percent) felt Massachusetts prisons were overcrowded, and smaller majorities favored building another 1,000-cell prison in the state (64 percent), even after being told that such a facility would cost \$100 million to build and \$25 million annually to operate (53 percent). Seventeen years later, residents favor a very different solution to the problem.

The public thinks the system itself is contributing to recidivism.

Residents do not want to reduce the prison population simply for the sake of doing so; a majority think time in prison is actually contributing to recidivism. Three in five (59 percent) think that most inmates are *more likely* to commit new crimes after being released, because they have been hardened by their experience in prison (Figure 3). This figure is virtually identical to responses to the same question asked in a 2005 statewide poll conducted for The Boston Foundation. While there has been an increase in the number who think inmates could be rehabilitated in prison, it is still only about half the number who see prison as part of the problem.

Participants in the focus groups also picked up on this dynamic. One participant said, “I think that if a young man or young woman gets into ‘the system,’ they can often become more of a criminal than they were when they went in.” “Ideally, the goal of the criminal justice system was to rehabilitate prisoners to be able to reenter society, but I think we’ve gone the other way,” said another.

Figure 2:

Two-thirds favor reform over building more prisons

Q: In your view, would it be preferable to build more prisons here in Massachusetts, or reform the state’s criminal justice system so fewer people are sent to prison?

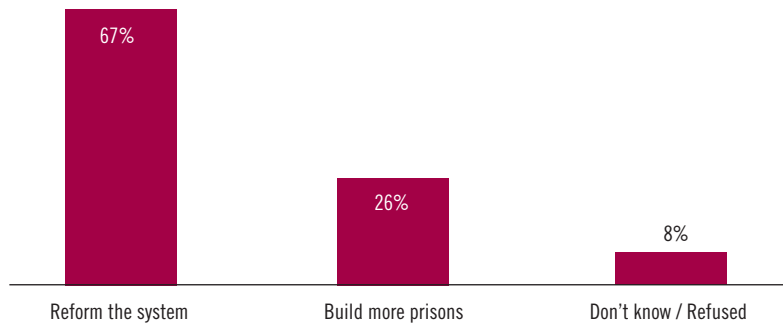
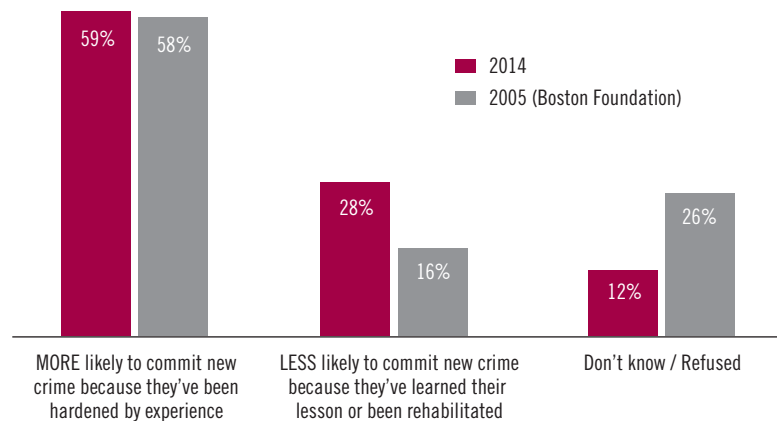


Figure 3:

Cycle of crime: residents see time in prison as contributing to recidivism

Q: In Massachusetts, when most inmates get out of prison, do you think they are...



DO SCANDALS MATTER?

We asked focus group participants whether they were aware of two recent scandals within the criminal justice system: patronage hiring at the probation department and the falsifying of tests at the state drug lab. The probation scandal seemed not to register with the focus groups, at least not as it relates to the criminal justice system. More were aware of the drug lab scandal, with a few bringing it up without prompting. Most saw the drug lab scandal as a sign of a systemic problem, rather than an isolated incident.

Multiple focus groups brought up an older story, that of a paroled criminal fatally shooting a Woburn police officer in 2010, leading to the wholesale replacement of the state parole board. The resonance of that story reflects public concerns about the effectiveness of post-release supervision of inmates and bears consideration in discussions of policy changes that would put more emphasis on probation and parole over incarceration.

Public opinion on this point is in line with the actual data on recidivism in Massachusetts. According to the MassINC report, approximately 60 percent of inmates released from state and county facilities in 2005 reoffended within 6 years.

Despite such high levels of recidivism, however, the public is not ready to affix blame exclusively to prisoners for repeat offenses. Fifty-seven percent think inmates reoffend because they lack the opportunities and resources to build a better life after release, compared to 37 percent who think that “some people are always going to be criminals.” As one focus group participation put it: “I think when someone gets out of prison they need to be helped along to get their bearings. Otherwise they’ll be confused and disoriented and go back to what they were doing before.”

Others in the focus groups cited the difficulties of finding work with the label of ex-offender complicating the search for employment. Taken together, these findings suggest residents see the criminal justice system itself as part of the problem.

This conclusion is further supported by the public’s ratings of the effectiveness of the current

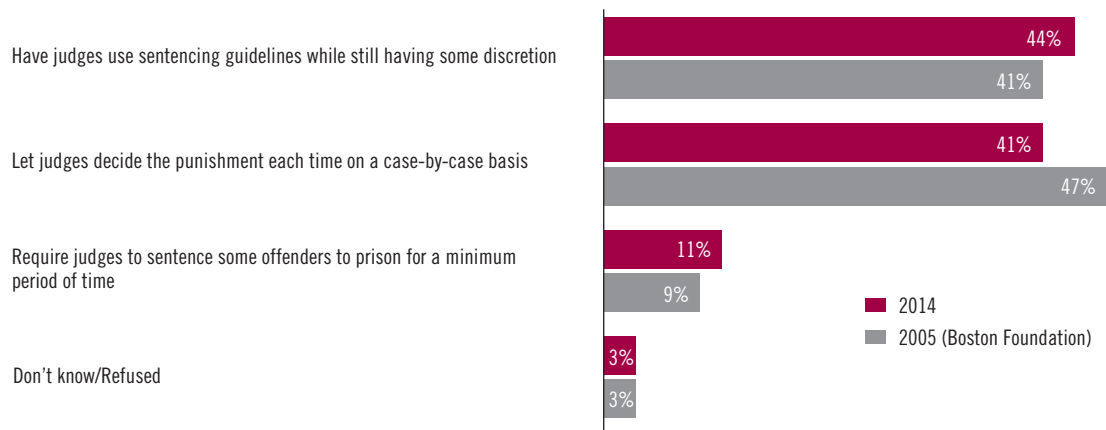
system. More think the system is ineffective (46 percent) than effective (41 percent) at preparing prisoners for release and reentry into society, and the public is split as to the system’s performance on rehabilitating young offenders and preventing future crime by helping criminals reform.

On sentencing, the public prefers judicial discretion over mandatory minimums.

One driver of Massachusetts’s growing prison population is the policy, enacted by law, of mandating that criminals guilty of certain crimes be sentenced to prison for a minimum term. According to the MassINC report, this practice has had a number of unintended consequences:

In FY 2011, nearly two-thirds of drug offenders and almost 60 percent of non-drug offenders received sentences where the maximum and minimum were very similar. This sentence structure limits parole eligibility, reducing the incentive offenders have to take steps to self-rehabilitate while in prison. It also means more offenders return to the community without supervision. In 2011, nearly half of inmates released to the street from DOC facilities received no supervision.

Figure 4:
Scant support for mandatory minimums
Q: Which is the best way for judges to sentence convicted offenders?



The use of mandatory minimum sentencing dates back to a tough-on-crime approach adopted during the 1980s and 1990s that has persisted to today. In 2012, the legislature passed and Gov. Patrick signed a so-called Three Strikes Law mandating life without parole for certain repeat offenders. Passing such laws, especially in the wake of a highly publicized crime or wave of crimes, may be a natural and politically expedient reaction, but our research suggests it is very much contrary to the will of the public.

When presented with three sentencing options, only 11 percent think that requiring judges to sentence some offenders for a minimum period of time is the best policy (Figure 4). About equal numbers favor letting judges use sentencing guidelines while retaining some discretion (44 percent) and letting judges decide on a case-by-case basis (41 percent). Half (51 percent) of those in higher crime areas into which more inmates are released, and who are most likely to be familiar with the effects of the current policy, favored a case-by-case approach. Further supporting this finding is the fact that more think that requiring prisoners to serve their entire sentence would be ineffective (50 percent)

than effective (45 percent) at reducing crime.

Focus groups participants were also wary of mandatory sentencing. “There aren’t two crimes that are exactly the same, so why should sentencing be?” asked one participant. “I think there has got to be judge’s discretion for extenuating circumstances,” said another.

This is not a newly held opinion in Massachusetts. The 2005 Boston Foundation survey asked the same question on mandatory minimums, and our findings closely mirror theirs. On this issue, public opinion and public policy have been at odds for some time.

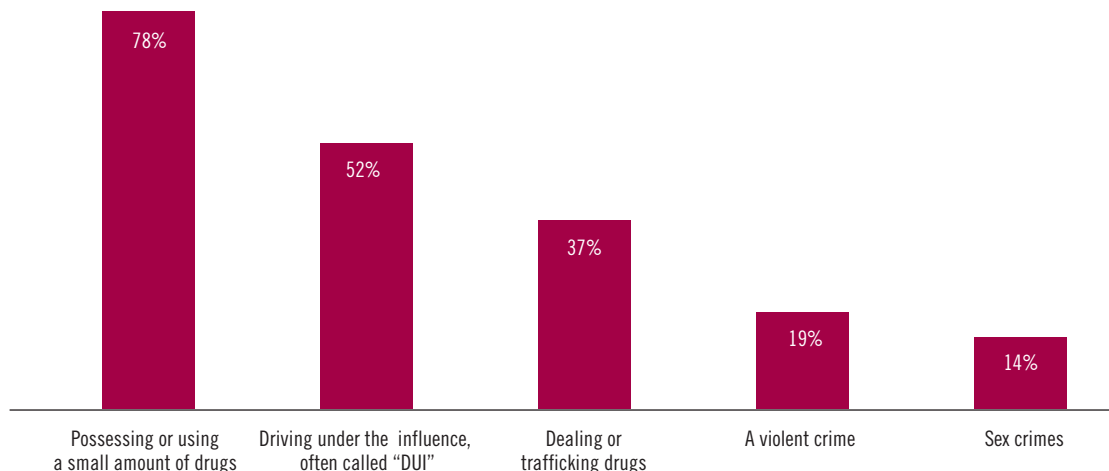
Residents still favor strong punishment for serious offenses, but not for drug use.

The public’s preference for judicial discretion in sentencing should not be misconstrued, however. Residents still favor strong punishment for serious offenses (Figure 5). When asked whether they would consider early release with supervision for inmates who had committed a variety of crimes but who had a record of good behavior, there was a widely held belief that those convicted of violent crimes or sex crimes should

Figure 5:

Early release for drug use, but not for other offenses

Q: Would you ever consider early release on parole for someone convicted of...



serve their full sentences. One focus group participant made a distinction between violent and non-violent offenders: “I think violent criminals should be locked up and throw away the key, and non-violent ones should serve their sentence in a facility that would be appropriate to that level of incarceration.” Opinion was split on driving under the influence, an offense that came up frequently in the online focus groups as one that was punished too lightly.

It is likely the public is not aware of the relationship between serving full sentences and unsupervised release. Under current sentencing and parole policies, serving one’s entire sentence often results in no supervision. If the public understood this relationship, it is likely they would prefer some sort of supervised release scenario. A top concern during the focus groups was that criminals released under various reforms would not be well supervised and would commit new crimes.

If the public takes a hard line towards violent and sex crimes, it has a very different view of drug use. According to the MassINC report, “drug offenders account for more than one-quarter of the growth in the state prison population since 1990” and “70 percent of DOC [Department of

Correction] inmates currently incarcerated for a drug offense were sentenced under mandatory minimum statutes.” Overall, drug offenders comprise 22 percent of the DOC population, despite national research showing that incarcerating more drug offenders has little impact on crime.⁶

More than three-quarters (78 percent) would allow early release for some of these drug offenders, those convicted only of “possessing or using a small amount of drugs.” This opinion may reflect a change in public attitudes towards drug use and addiction. Indeed, more than twice as many felt that that drug use should be treated more as a health problem than as a crime (64 percent to 27 percent). Half (51 percent) felt that the current system was ineffective at rehabilitating prisoners who are addicted to drugs or alcohol, and 83 percent favor sending drug users to treatment instead of prison.

Public opinion is very different, however, on the matter of dealing drugs, and a majority (58 percent) thinks drug traffickers should serve their full sentences. It is clear the public does not view all drug offenders equally, and it is important that discussion of policy around drug crimes reflect that distinction.

NATIONAL ATTITUDES SOFTENING ON DRUG USE

Our findings on drug use are also consistent with changing opinion, nationally and in Massachusetts. In April 2014, the Pew Research Center found that 67 percent nationwide favored treatment for users of hard drugs like cocaine and heroin, compared to 26 percent who favored prosecution.⁷ This ratio mirrors our finding that more Massachusetts residents view drugs as a health problem (64 percent) than a crime (24 percent). Pew also found that twice as many think states’ shifting away from mandatory drugs sentences for non-violent drug offenders is good than bad (63 percent versus 32 percent). This represents a marked shift in opinion from when Pew asked the question in 2001, when the public was split on the issue.

Shifting opinion on drugs and criminal justice is consistent with a change in attitude towards legalizing some drugs. A March 2014 WBUR poll conducted by the MassINC Polling Group found that 48 percent of likely voters in this fall’s gubernatorial election favor legalizing marijuana, compared to 41 percent opposed. This marked a shift from a November 2013 poll by Western New England University, which found that 51 percent of adults opposed full legalization. Opinion is changing nationally as well. In 2013, both Pew and Gallup found majority support for legalizing marijuana for the first time in over 4 decades of polling on the issue.⁸

III. PURSUING REFORM

In order to address the shortcomings they see in the current system, residents favor shifting priorities away from punishment and enforcement and towards prevention and rehabilitation. Reforms that ease reentry for released inmates and treat drug use and mental illness are rated more likely to be effective than tough-on-crime measures, a dynamic that has strengthened since MassINC's 1997 poll and which is consistent with other recent national polling. Residents are less concerned about the cost of the system in pursuing reforms, preferring instead to create a system that is effective at reducing crime.

Prevention should be the top priority.

Residents want a criminal justice system that works, but they view the system's role as more than capturing, prosecuting, and incarcerating criminals. The public wants a system that targets the preconditions of crime as well. "Prevention, such as education and youth programs" was the public's top priority for the criminal justice system (43 percent; Figure 6). Rehabilitating prisoners through education and job training was ranked

second (21 percent). Taken together, these two priorities were favored by nearly twice as many as punishment (15 percent) and enforcement (19 percent). These priority preferences were virtually identical to those found in the 2005 Boston Foundation poll. As with recidivism and mandatory minimums, public opinion on prevention and rehabilitation has been positive for some time.

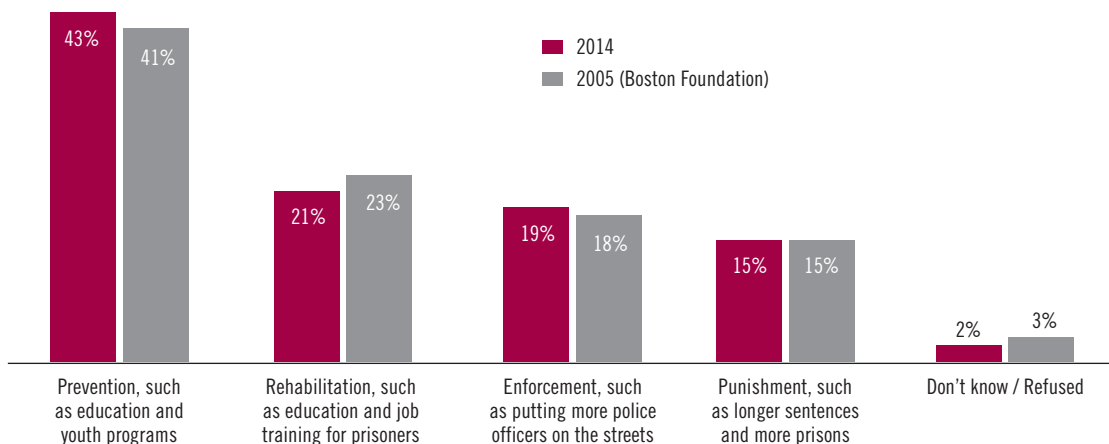
Rehabilitating offenders was viewed favorably by focus group participants as well. "The goal should be to reduce crime by [...] rehabilitating criminals who can change," one said. Another asked, "What's the point of simply holding criminals and not making them change?"

There is a sharp disconnect between the public's favored priorities and the perceived strengths of the current system. As noted previously, majorities think the current system is effective at punishing criminals, the least favored priority. But opinion is less rosy about the system's performance on rehabilitation and prevention; only 10 percent think the current system is "very effective" at "preventing future crimes by helping criminals reform."

Figure 6:

Prevention has long been top priority for criminal justice

Q: Which do you think should be a top priority for dealing with crime?

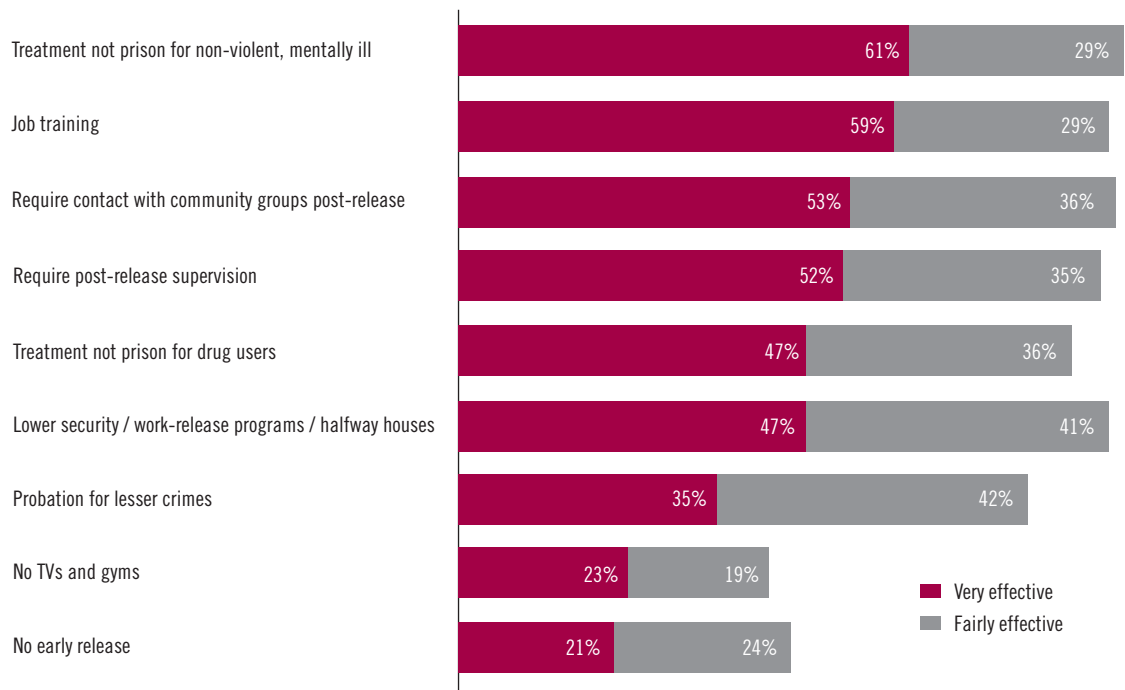


Reentry and treatment are seen as more likely to be effective than more punitive measures.

There is a clear divide in opinion about the perceived effectiveness of policies aimed at easing reentry and providing treatment versus more punitive, tough-on-crime measures (Figure 7). Majorities thought all of the reform-oriented interventions would be effective, and most thought four policies—requiring post-release supervision for all inmates, job training programs, requiring inmates to connect with community groups upon release, and diverting non-violent mentally ill offenders to treatment—would be “very effective” in reducing crime. On the other hand, most thought that the two so-called tough-on-crime measures—requiring all prisoners to serve their entire sentence without early release and removing televisions and gyms from prisons and focusing on punishing inmates for their crimes—would not be effective.

Several of the policy changes tested were repeated from MassINC’s 1997 poll on criminal justice. (Please see the topline results for notes on differences in question wording.) Comparing the results from the two surveys shows a clear shift in opinion away from more punitive measures towards other strategies (Figure 8). The percentage who thought providing job training to inmates would reduce crime jumped ten points between 1997 and 2014. Opinion on the effectiveness of diverting drug users to treatment climbed 14 points, consistent with the larger change in public attitudes about drug use discussed before. Support for requiring post-release supervision, already high in 1997, held steady, while belief in the effectiveness of removing TVs and gyms from prisons dropped. These changes in opinion suggest that the public has moved on from the tough-on-crime attitudes of the 1990s and are open to a different approach.

Figure 7:
Reentry, treatment seen as more effective than more punitive measures
See topline (Appendix B) for full question wording



One intervention, moving inmates into lower security prisons and halfway houses to prepare them for release, was also repeated in the Boston Foundation’s 2005 poll. In that survey, 33 percent felt such a policy would be very effective in reducing crime, and 47 percent felt it would be somewhat effective—closer to the 1997 findings than ours. This suggests a more recent shift in opinion on this point.

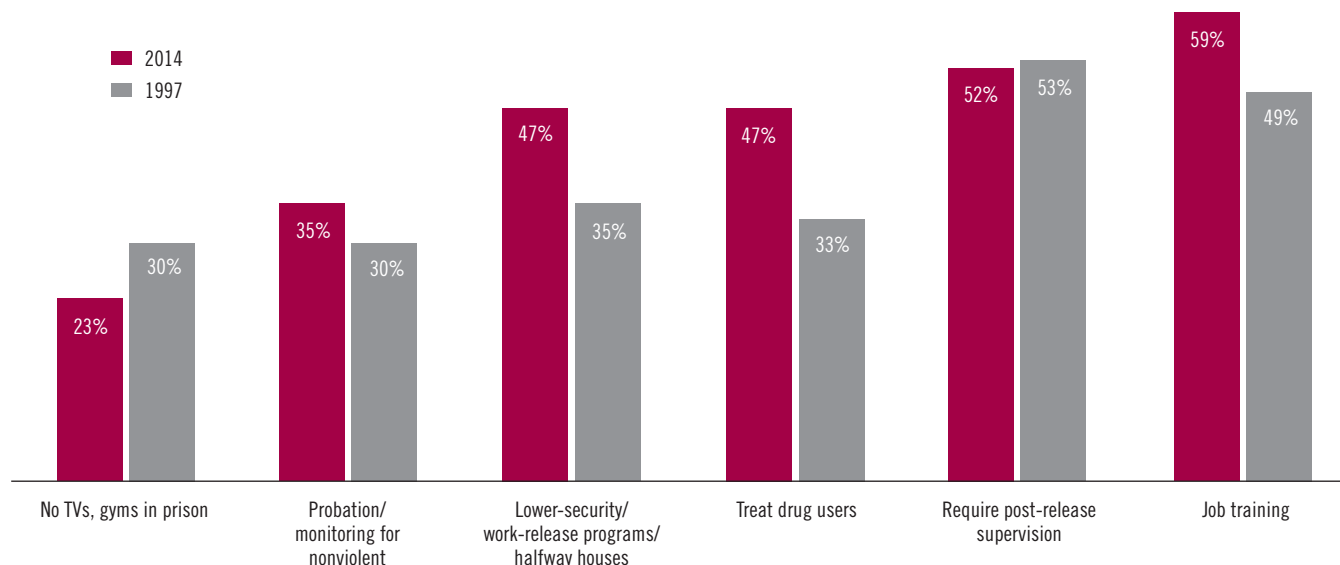
On other measures, however, the findings of the 2005 poll seem largely consistent with opinion today. Three-quarters (75 percent) in that poll thought it very important that prisoners get an education so as to help them get a job upon release, an issue that also arose frequently in the focus groups. Four in five (79 percent) thought that requiring prisoners work and receive job training in prison was very important. And by more than a 2-to-1 margin (66 percent to 29 percent), more in 2005 favored a tougher approach to the causes of crimes over a tougher approach to crime itself—consistent with the desire to prioritize prevention through education in both the 2005 and 2014 surveys.

The public favors post-release supervision, but there is skepticism about follow-through.

Mandatory post-release supervision, which was thought likely to be very effective at reducing crime by majorities in both the 1997 and 2014 polls, encapsulates the public’s desire for an effective system: They want inmates to be released, but they also want them to be monitored closely so that they do not commit new crimes. According to MassINC’s report, nearly half (48 percent) of inmates released from DOC facilities in 2011 received no post-release supervision. As noted previously, this is an unintended consequence of mandatory minimum sentencing, which often results in too small a window between minimum and maximum sentences to allow for an effective period of parole.

While criminal justice advocates have been aware of this issue for some time, the general public is not very well-informed on the current state of practice on post-release supervision. Residents are evenly split over whether they think most criminal sentences include a period of post-release

Figure 8:
Effectiveness of interventions, 2014 v. 1997
 Percent saying “very effective” at reducing crime



supervision; 43 percent thought most did receive supervision, and 41 percent thought many did not. Similarly, focus group participants frequently confused parole and probation and showed little understanding of the functions of either.

At the same time, the public has concerns about the effectiveness of the post-release supervision that currently occurs. In the focus groups, the top concern regarding reforming the criminal justice system was that “those on probation or parole will not be supervised effectively, causing a spike in crime.” Participants cited the workloads of supervisors as driving their concern.

WHEN IT COMES TO PUBLIC SAFETY, MOST PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO PINCH PENNIES, BUT THEY WANT TO MAKE SURE THEIR MONEY IS WELL SPENT.

“Yes, parolees are supposed to check in with their P.O. [Parole Officer], but the P.O. is so overworked that he can't devote the time needed to the parolee,” noted one focus group participant.

In multiple focus groups, when asked about news stories they had heard about the criminal justice system, participants brought up the 2010

case of Dominic Cinelli, a career criminal who shot and killed a Woburn police officer after being released on parole. This concern about the effectiveness of supervision may explain why another intervention, sentencing non-violent offenders to probation instead of prison, was viewed as effective by a smaller majority than other reforms.

Effectiveness trumps cost savings as an argument for reform.

In addition to rating the effectiveness of individual policy ideas, respondents were asked whether they would support or oppose the following package of reforms:

Some people say we should reform our criminal justice system to include probation or shorter sentences for non-violent criminals, in facilities designed to prepare them to be released to society. The worst, most violent criminals would still be imprisoned for lengthy sentences. Judges would have more flexibility and discretion to sentence non-violent criminals and drug users on a case-by-case basis, rather than through mandatory minimum sentencing. Finally, those convicted of using drugs would receive drug rehabilitation treatment rather than being sent to prison.

SUPPORT FOR REFORM NATIONWIDE

If comparisons to previous Massachusetts polls show a shift in opinion towards reform, comparing this poll to national figures suggests Massachusetts is coming into line with the rest of the country on these issues. A 2012 poll on sentencing and corrections for the Pew Center for the States found strong support for various aspects of criminal justice reform, including:

- 84 percent agree that “some of the money that we are spending on locking up low-risk, non-violent inmates should be shifted to strengthening community corrections programs like probation and parole”;
- 69 percent agree that there are too many inmates in prisons and support expanding alternatives to incarceration;
- large majorities favor diverting non-violent offenders or reducing their sentences to achieve a range of other goals;
- 90% prioritize preventing recidivism over focusing on the length of a prisoner's sentence; and
- two-thirds (67 percent) favor shorter sentences with post-release supervision over longer sentences without supervision.⁹

A recent analysis of trends in public opinion in criminal justice drawing from the national General Social Survey and polls by Gallup and national media organizations also suggests a shift in opinion nationally over the past two decades on a variety of criminal justice issues.¹⁰

When presented with this agenda, 85 percent of residents voiced their support, and a majority (52 percent) said they would strongly support such a change in policy (Figure 9). Support was strong across almost all demographic groups, although there was a partisan divide in terms of the intensity of support, with 65 percent of Democrats strongly supporting reform, compared to 43 percent of Republicans and 50 percent of independents. (Large majorities from each party supported reform overall.)

Support for reform increased when residents were told that other states that had implemented such changes had saved money. Support increased even more when they were told that these policies had reduced crime; 91 percent supported the reform agenda when told it had reduced crime in other states.

That crime reduction is a more persuasive argument than cost savings is consistent with the responses to another question in the survey (Figure 10). About half (51 percent) are willing to pay whatever it takes to have an effective criminal justice system. Only 37 percent say we need to save money, even if it means reducing resources, even if it means raising taxes.

Prioritizing effectiveness over cost savings also came through in the focus groups, where many participants actually volunteered that they would be willing to pay *more* for a more effective system. When asked to rate various reasons for reforming the criminal justice system, the top argument was reducing crime by reducing recidivism. Saving money, whether to invest in other priorities or to lower taxes, were two of the three least persuasive arguments. When it comes to public safety, most people don't want to pinch pennies, but they do want to make sure their money is well spent.

The focus groups evaluated a similar reform proposal, and the cost savings and crime reduction arguments, to similar results. Participants were surprised, intrigued, and frustrated when they heard that a reformed system has been

Figure 9:

Reducing crime more effective argument for reform than cost savings

Percent who "strongly support" reform

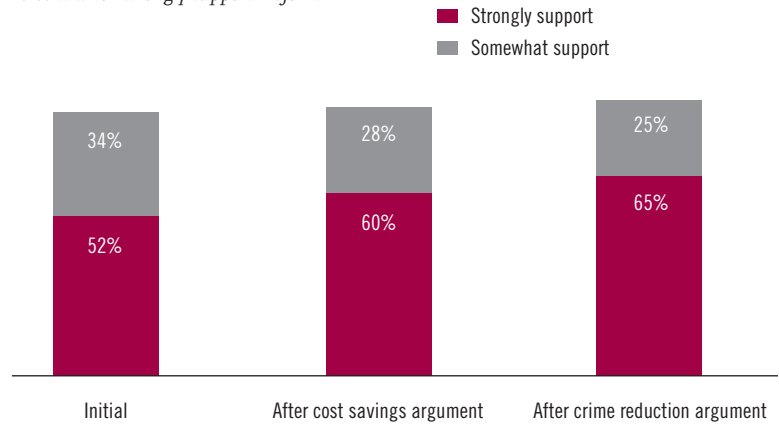
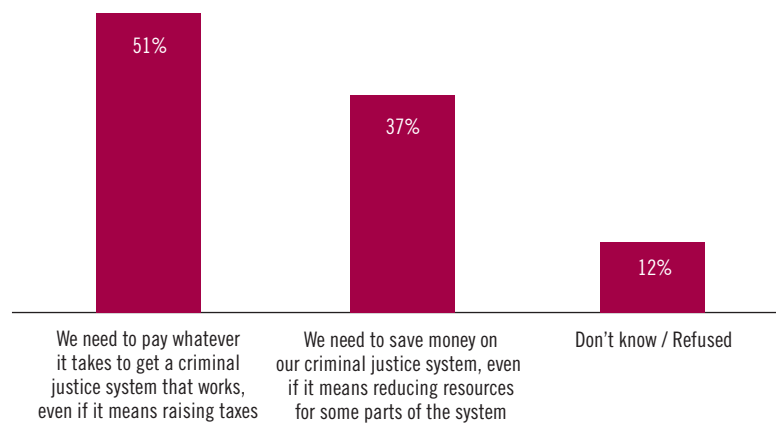


Figure 10:

Effectiveness trumps cost savings

Q: Which statement is closer to your own view?



found to be both more effective and less expensive in other states. While cost alone may not be a persuasive argument, combining cost with crime reduction—and citing evidence that it has worked elsewhere—appears to be an effective message.

Figure 11:

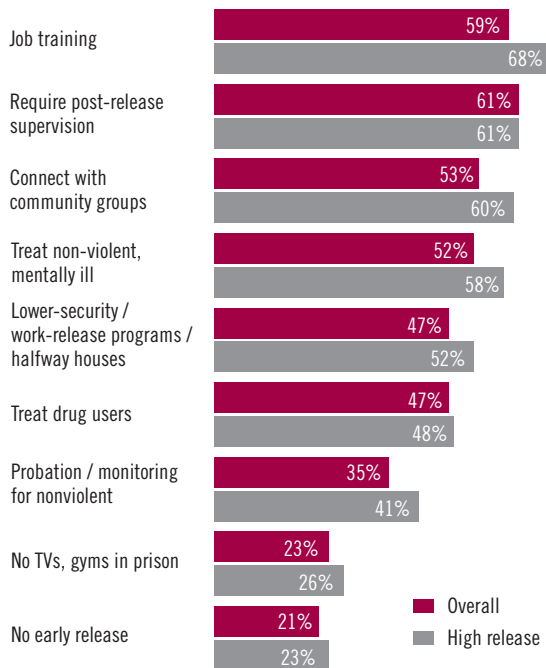
Ten Massachusetts cities bear brunt of violent crime

CITY	SHARE OF MA VIOLENT CRIME	SHARE OF MA HOMICIDES	SHARE OF DOC RELEASES
Boston	20%	35%	18%
Springfield	7%	8%	9%
Worcester	6%	3%	6%
Lowell	4%	1%	2%
New Bedford	4%	1%	3%
Brockton	4%	4%	3%
Fall River	4%	2%	2%
Lynn	3%	1%	3%
Lawrence	2%	5%	2%
Chelsea	2%	4%	NA
Top 10 Share	56%	67%	49%

Figure 12:

High-release areas enthusiastic about reform; Reentry interventions particularly popular

Percent saying “very effective” in reducing crime



“HIGH-RELEASE” AREAS ALSO FAVOR REFORM

One disturbing finding from the MassINC report was that the incidence of violent crime in the state—and the consequences of those crimes, including the incarceration and release of individuals from those communities—is highly concentrated in a handful of cities in the Commonwealth. In 2011, Boston and nine Gateway Cities accounted for 56 percent of the violent crimes in the state, 67 percent of the homicides, and they received 49 percent of the inmates released from the Department of Correction (Figure 11). Within Boston, the impacts are even further concentrated, with the vast majority of violence occurring in Mattapan, Roxbury, and Dorchester.

Because these communities would be impacted more than others by criminal justice reforms, understanding public opinion among residents of these areas is particularly important. Two of the focus groups were recruited solely from these communities: one from the most impacted neighborhoods in Boston, and the other from the nine most impacted Gateway Cities. The poll also included additional interviews in Boston and the Gateway Cities, so as to be able to analyze responses from there more fully.

Residents of these “high-release” areas (the high-crime neighborhoods of Boston, plus the nine Gateway Cities), express similar opinions to the rest of the state, with only a few significant differences. Perhaps not surprisingly given the crime statistics, fewer residents of high-release areas said they feel very safe in their homes at night (61 percent versus 75 percent overall) and walking in the neighborhoods after dark (32 percent versus 55 percent). They also have slightly less confidence in the current criminal justice system: 63 percent had “a lot” or “some” confidence and 35 percent had “a little” or “no confidence,” compared to a 71/27 split overall.

Despite this, they were more likely to think the current system was “very effective” at achieving various priorities, except for “ensuring all people accused of a crime receive a fair trial.” This concern about the fairness of the system came through in the focus groups as well, where the high-release groups ranked “making the courts and prison system more fair and just” as the most persuasive argument for pursuing reform.

High-release communities also responded more enthusiastically to several of the reform ideas: job training, requiring released inmates to connect with community groups, treating the mentally ill, transitioning inmates towards release with work-release and halfway houses, and probation for nonviolent offenders (Figure 11). At the same time, the high-release focus groups were even more concerned than the overall population about a lack of supervision of released inmates resulting in a spike in crime. So while these populations are willing to try reform, they also harbor reservations that reform will be carried out effectively.

IV. CONCLUSION

Massachusetts residents appear ready to reform a criminal justice system they perceive as ineffective in the areas they would prioritize: prevention and rehabilitation. They are also very concerned about the counterproductive impacts of prison time on recidivism, prefer judicial discretion over mandatory minimum sentences, and distinguish between drug use, which they think of more as a health issue, and the crime of drug dealing.

To fix the system, they favor many of the reforms that have been adopted in other states, both individually and when presented as a comprehensive reform agenda. And while hearing that other states have saved money through reform does increase support, residents are more concerned with having a system that is effective at reducing crime, regardless of cost. These opinions have shifted from the tough-on-crime days of the 1990s, and they are consistent with recent national polls and trends in opinion over time.

These findings were first presented at a

MassINC event in February 2014. Gov. Deval Patrick spoke at the forum and used the occasion to lay out a plan for reducing recidivism by 50 percent over the next 5 years. The broad strokes of his plan—improving reentry programs for released inmates, expanding treatment for drug abuse, improving care for the mentally ill, and reinstating a long-dormant state commission to examine sentencing policy—are consistent with the reforms residents rated as likely to be effective at reducing crime.

THE BROAD STROKES OF GOV. PATRICK'S PLAN ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE REFORMS RESIDENTS RATED AS LIKELY TO BE EFFECTIVE AT REDIRECTING CRIME.

It will be up to the next governor to either continue Patrick's 5-year plan or pursue another vision for the criminal justice system. Either way, we hope lawmakers will find the results of this public opinion research useful in crafting policy.



SURVEY METHODOLOGY

This report covers a public opinion research project comprising a series of four focus groups and a statewide public opinion poll. The project was sponsored by MassINC. The research process was guided by a steering committee made up of criminal justice practitioners, experts, and activists.

Focus groups

Four online focus groups were conducted with residents of different areas of Massachusetts. Online focus groups permit a more geographically diverse group of participants, which was important to ensure we were not exploring only specific localized conditions. The groups lasted approximately 90 minutes and included moderated discussions as well as quantitative exercises completed during the group sessions.

The groups were conducted from late August through early September of 2013. The four groups were composed as follows: 1) lower-release neighborhoods of Boston and the inner suburbs, 2) rural and exurban areas of Massachusetts, 3) higher-release areas of the city of Boston, and 4) higher-release Gateway Cities (Brockton, Chelsea, Fall River, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, Springfield, and Worcester). Each group's demographic makeup was similar to that of the areas from which the participants were drawn. The four areas were chosen to give a broad spectrum of opinion regarding criminal justice reform issues. Group members were paid an incentive for their participation.

Public opinion poll

Poll results are from a public opinion poll of 1,207 Massachusetts residents conducted January 23-29, 2014. The margin of sampling error is +/- 3.5 percent for the entire sample. Interviewing was conducted by Braun Research, Inc. in English and Spanish using live telephone interviews. Residents were reached on both landlines and cell phones.

Oversampling

Because of the subject matter of the poll, specific attention was paid to communities where significant numbers of Department of Correction (DOC) inmates are released. According to a recent MassINC report, 49 percent of all DOC releases take place in Boston and nine Gateway Cities. If sentencing and release policies change, these communities will be disproportionately affected.

With this in mind, two oversamples were added to the poll to provide a more precise understanding of public opinion in areas most affected by both crime and inmate release policies. Oversamples of 200 interviews were conducted in each of two areas: 1) The city of Boston and 2) The nine Gateway Cities that receive the highest number of DOC releases.

Weighting

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for sample designs and patterns of non-response that might bias results. Weights were applied to adjust for the oversampling of certain cities, to account for different probabilities of selection associated with each respondent's telephone usage patterns, and to reflect Massachusetts adult general population parameters.

POLL TOPLINE RESULTS

Survey of 1,207 Massachusetts residents

Field Dates: January 23-29, 2014

Overall, do you think things in Massachusetts are headed in the right direction or are they off on the wrong track?

Right Direction	54%
Wrong Track	38%
Don't Know / Refused	9%

Now I have some questions about how safe you feel. Please tell me how safe you think you and your family are from crime in some different locations. Are you very safe, somewhat safe, not too safe, or not at all safe from crime at this location?

2004 MassINC: *The Pursuit of Happiness: A Survey on the Quality of Life in Massachusetts*

ORDER ROTATED		VERY SAFE	SOMEWHAT SAFE	NOT TOO SAFE	NOT AT ALL SAFE	DON'T GO OUT AT NIGHT	DON'T KNOW / REFUSED
At home at night	2014	75%	22%	2%	1%	N/A	<1%
	2004	77%	20%	2%	1%	N/A	1%
When walking in your neighborhood after dark	2014	55%	30%	7%	5%	N/A	3%
	2004	53%	35%	6%	3%	2%	1%

How much confidence do you have in the criminal justice system here in Massachusetts, which consists of the police, the courts, probation, parole, and prisons—do you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, a little or no confidence at all?

2005 Boston Foundation: *Rethinking Justice in Massachusetts: Public Attitudes Toward Crime and Punishment*
 “How much confidence do you have in the criminal justice system as a whole—do you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, a little or no confidence at all?”

	2014	2005
A lot of confidence	24%	19%
Some confidence	47%	45%
A little confidence	19%	25%
No confidence at all	8%	8%
Don't Know / Refused	2%	3%

Which statement is closer to your own view? We need to save money on our criminal justice system, even if it means reducing resources for some parts of the system. OR We need to pay whatever it takes to get a criminal justice system that works, even if it means raising taxes. *Order rotated.*

We need to save money on our criminal justice system, even if it means reducing resources for some parts of the system.	37%
We need to pay whatever it takes to get a criminal justice system that works, even if it means raising taxes.	51%
Don't Know / Refused	12%

Which do you think should be a top priority for dealing with crime? *Order rotated.*

2005 Boston Foundation: *Rethinking Justice in Massachusetts: Public Attitudes Toward Crime and Punishment*

	2014	2005
Prevention, such as education and youth programs	43%	41%
Rehabilitation, such as education and job training for prisoners	21%	23%
Punishment, such as longer sentences and more prisons	15%	15%
Enforcement, such as putting more police officers on the streets	19%	18%
Don't Know / Refused	2%	3%

Overall, how effective is the criminal justice system in Massachusetts at each of the following?

ORDER ROTATED	VERY EFFECTIVE	FAIRLY EFFECTIVE	NOT TOO EFFECTIVE	NOT REALLY EFFECTIVE AT ALL	DON'T KNOW / REFUSED
Ensuring all people accused of a crime receive a fair trial	29%	44%	12%	9%	6%
Punishing those found guilty of a crime	19%	46%	16%	12%	7%
Rehabilitating young people convicted of crimes so they don't become career criminals	14%	32%	27%	18%	9%
Preventing future crime by helping criminals reform	10%	35%	26%	20%	10%
Addressing the needs of prisoners who have a mental illness	10%	26%	23%	24%	16%
Rehabilitating prisoners addicted to drugs or alcohol	9%	28%	29%	22%	12%
Preparing prisoners for release and reentry into society	9%	32%	25%	21%	13%

Here are three options. Which is the best way for judges to sentence convicted offenders? *Order rotated.*

2005 *Boston Foundation: Rethinking Justice in Massachusetts: Public Attitudes Toward Crime and Punishment*

	2014	2005
Require judges to sentence some offenders to prison for a minimum period of time	11%	9%
Have judges use sentencing guidelines while still having some discretion	44%	41%
Let judges decide the punishment each time on a case-by-case basis	41%	47%
Don't Know / Refused	3%	3%

As you may know, in Massachusetts, the court appoints and pays private lawyers to represent low-income people accused of crimes. Do you think these court-appointed private lawyers are generally good lawyers, just OK lawyers, or not good lawyers?

2002 *Open Society Institute and National Legal Aid and Defender Association: Developing a National Message for Indigent Defense: Analysis of National Survey*

	2014	2002 NATIONAL
Generally good	27%	14%
Just OK	49%	50%
Not good	13%	28%
Don't Know / Refused	11%	7%

How important is it for the state government to provide adequate funds to pay lawyers to represent people who can't afford their own lawyers—very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important.

Very important	58%
Somewhat important	29%
Not too important	7%
Not at all important	5%
Don't Know / Refused	1%

Do you think there are too many people in prison in Massachusetts, not enough people in prison, or is the number of people in prison about right?

2012 *Pew States: Public Opinion on Sentencing and Corrections Policy in America*

	2014	2012 NATIONAL
Too many	40%	45%
Not enough	17%	13%
About the right amount	27%	28%
Don't Know / Refused	16%	14%

In your view, would it be preferable to build more prisons here in Massachusetts, or reform the state's criminal justice system so fewer people are sent to prison?

Build more prisons	26%
Reform the system so fewer people are sent to prison	67%
Don't Know / Refused	8%

Would you ever consider early release on parole for someone convicted of READ ITEM if he has good behavior, completes drug treatment, and was strictly supervised after his release, or should all who are convicted of READ ITEM have to serve their entire sentence?

ORDER ROTATED	WOULD CONSIDER EARLY RELEASE	SHOULD SERVE ENTIRE SENTENCE	DON'T KNOW / REFUSED
Possessing or using a small amount of drugs	78%	18%	3%
Dealing or trafficking drugs	37%	58%	4%
Driving under the influence, often called "DUI"	52%	43%	6%
A violent crime	19%	76%	4%
Sex crimes	14%	81%	5%

In your opinion, should using drugs be treated more as a crime or more as a health problem?

More as a crime	24%
More as a health problem	64%
Both / neither / depends (not read)	11%
Don't Know / Refused	2%

Next, for each of the following, please tell me how effective, if at all, you think that it is or would be in substantially reducing crime—very effective, fairly effective, not too effective, or not really effective at all.

1997 MassINC: *Criminal Justice in Massachusetts, The Public's View*

2005 Boston Foundation: *Rethinking Justice in Massachusetts: Public Attitudes Toward Crime and Punishment*

	YEAR	VERY EFFECTIVE	FAIRLY EFFECTIVE	NOT TOO EFFECTIVE	NOT REALLY EFFECTIVE AT ALL	DON'T KNOW / REFUSED
Getting rid of things like television sets and gyms for prisoners, and concentrating on punishing them for their crimes	2014	23%	19%	24%	32%	2%
	1997	30%	21%	24%	18%	6%
Sending only those convicted of violent crimes and dealers of hard drugs to prison, and sentencing those convicted of lesser crimes to probation under close monitoring and control	2014	35%	42%	11%	9%	3%
	1997	30%	38%	18%	9%	5%
Doing more to prepare inmates for release from prison by gradually moving them to a lower security level in prison, to work-release programs, to halfway houses and the like	2014	47%	41%	5%	5%	3%
	2005	33%	47%	9%	4%	7%
	1997	35%	43%	11%	5%	5%
Require prisoners who are about to be released to connect with community groups that can help them after their release	2014	53%	36%	6%	3%	2%
Provide prisoners with job training so they can find work after they are released*	2014	59%	29%	7%	4%	1%
	1997	49%	39%	8%	3%	2%
Send drug users to treatment rather than prison to keep them separated from hardened criminals**	2014	47%	36%	7%	8%	2%
	1997	33%	48%	13%	4%	3%
Send nonviolent, mentally ill people to treatment rather than to prison to keep them separated from hardened criminals	2014	61%	29%	5%	4%	2%
Require a period of supervision for all prisoners following their release***	2014	52%	35%	7%	5%	1%
	1997	53%	39%	4%	1%	3%
Require all prisoners to serve out their entire sentence with no chance of early release	2014	21%	24%	22%	29%	5%

* 1997 "More job training for prison inmates—training them for real jobs when they get out"

** 1997 "More treatment for prison inmates who are drug addicts or alcoholics"

***1997 "Closer monitoring, supervision and control of those who are paroled from prison or put on probation"

In Massachusetts, when most inmates get out of prison, do you think they are...? *Order rotated.*

2005 Boston Foundation: *Rethinking Justice in Massachusetts: Public Attitudes Toward Crime and Punishment*

	2014	2005
LESS likely to commit new crime because they've learned their lesson or been rehabilitated	28%	16%
MORE likely to commit new crime because they've been hardened by their experience	59%	58%
Don't Know / Refused	12%	26%

To the best of your knowledge, do most criminal sentences include a period of supervision following release from prison? Or are many criminals released without any supervision?

Most include supervision	43%
Many released without any supervision	41%
Don't Know / Refused	16%

Which of the following do you think plays the largest role in released inmates committing additional crimes and being sent back to prison? *Order rotated.*

Inmates don't have the opportunities or resources to build a better life after release	57%
Some people are just going to be criminals, and will commit crimes no matter how many new chances they are given	37%
Don't Know / Refused	6%

Some people say we should reform our criminal justice system to include probation or shorter sentences for non-violent criminals, in facilities designed to prepare them to be released to society. The worst, most violent criminals would still be imprisoned for lengthy sentences. Judges would have more flexibility and discretion to sentence nonviolent criminals and drug users on a case-by-case basis, rather than through mandatory minimum sentencing. Finally, those convicted of using drugs would receive drug rehabilitation treatment rather than being sent to prison.

Thinking about the changes I just described, would you support or oppose changing the criminal justice in this way? And would you strongly (support/oppose) these changes, or just somewhat?

Strongly support	52%
Somewhat support	34%
Somewhat oppose	6%
Strongly oppose	5%
Don't Know / Refused	4%

Question order rotated for next two questions:

What if I told you other states have implemented these changes and found they cost less than what we are doing here in Massachusetts? Knowing this, would you support or oppose changing the criminal justice in this way?

Strongly support	60%
Somewhat support	28%
Somewhat oppose	4%
Strongly oppose	4%
Don't Know / Refused	4%

What if I told you other states have implemented these changes and found they result in lower crime rates than the type of system we have here in Massachusetts? Knowing this, would you support or oppose changing the criminal justice in this way?

Strongly support	65%
Somewhat support	25%
Somewhat oppose	3%
Strongly oppose	3%
Don't Know / Refused	3%

Have you or a member of your immediate family ever been a victim of a crime?

Self or immediate family member was victim of a crime	41%
Self or immediate family member was not victim of a crime	57%
Don't Know / Refused	2%

Have you or anyone you personally know ever been convicted of a crime and sentenced to prison?

Self or someone the respondent knew personally was convicted of a crime and sentenced to prison	42%
Self or someone the respondent knew personally was never convicted of a crime and sentenced to prison	57%
Don't Know / Refused	1%

Demographics

Race / ethnic background

White, not Hispanic	77%
Black, not Hispanic	6%
Hispanic	10%
Other	6%
Don't Know / Refused	2%

Age

18 to 29	20%
30 to 44	26%
45 to 59	29%
60+	26%
Don't Know / Refused	1%

Gender

Male	48%
Female	52%

Education

High school or less	36%
Some college, no degree	27%
College graduate (BA/BS)	21%
Advanced degree	14%
Don't Know / Refused	2%

ENDNOTES

- 1 “Public Opinion on Sentencing and Corrections in America” (Washington, D.C.: Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies for the Pew Center on the States Public Opinion Performance Project, March 2012); “Public Attitudes on Crime and Punishment in Georgia” (Washington, D.C.: Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies for the Pew Center on the States Public Opinion Performance Project, February 2012); “Public Attitudes on Crime and Punishment in Oregon” (Washington, D.C.: Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies for the Pew Center on the States Public Opinion Performance Project, April 2012); “Survey of Public Attitudes on Justice Reinvestment in Missouri” (Washington, D.C.: Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies for the Pew Center on the States Public Opinion Performance Project, March 2012).
- 2 In the 1997 poll, between 30 and 54 percent thought various mandatory sentences (for murderers, three-time violent offenders, drug dealers, violent juvenile offenders) would be very effective at reducing crime.
- 3 Ben Forman and John Larivee, *Crime Cost and Consequences: Is it Time to Get Smart on Crime?* MassINC, 2013.
- 4 “Public Opinion on Sentencing and Corrections in America” (Washington, D.C.: Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies for the Pew Center on the States Public Opinion Performance Project, March 2012).
- 5 “Criminal Justice in Massachusetts: The Public’s View.” (Boston, Mass: Harrison & Goldberg Incorporated for MassINC and Crime and Justice Foundation, May 1997).
- 6 Prison population data do not differentiate between “drug users” and “drug traffickers,” in part because of the difficulty making a clear distinction. Population counts are simply provided for “drug offenders.”
- 7 “America’s New Drug Policy Landscape.” Pew Research Center, April 2014.
- 8 “Majority Now Supports Legalizing Marijuana.” Pew Research Center, April 2013. “Gallup Poll Social Series: Crime” Gallup, Inc., October 2013.
- 9 “Public Opinion on Sentencing and Corrections in America” (Washington, D.C.: Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies for the Pew Center on the States Public Opinion Performance Project, March 2012).
- 10 Mark D. Ramirez. “Americans’ Changing Views on Crime and Punishment.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 77 No. 4, Winter 2013, pp. 1006-1031.

NOTES

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