

MEMORANDUM

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES
FROM: ROBERT BLIZZARD & GENE ULM
DATE: APRIL 6, 2021
RE: WISCONSIN STATEWIDE POLL RESULTS



On behalf of The Badger Institute and The Justice Action Network, Public Opinion Strategies recently completed a survey of 500 registered voters in Wisconsin, March 30-April 1, 2021. The survey has a margin of error of +4.38%.

KEY FINDINGS

- ***A majority of voters believe the state's criminal justice system "needs significant improvements."***
 - Most Wisconsin voters (54%) think the state's criminal justice system "needs significant improvements" while just 38% think it "is working pretty well as it is."

- ***Nearly three-quarters of Wisconsin voters support reforming expungement laws to grant eligibility after the sentence is completed.***
 - After voters are given some background about current expungement laws ("basically, the sealing of the record of minor criminal offenses for anyone who was under age 25 at the time of the offense if a judge finds during sentencing that the offender will benefit, and society will not be harmed") they support reforming this law so the decision to grant eligibility for the expungement is made after the sentence is completed instead of at the time of offense as it is now by a 72%-19% margin.
 - Support for reforming expungement laws extends across party lines, as Republicans (77%-19%), Independents (69%-22%), and Democrats (70%-15) agree to move expungement of records to the completion of the sentence rather than at the time of sentencing.
 - Further, significant majorities of very conservative voters (75%-20%), 2020 Trump voters (72%-21%), and strong Republicans (79%-18%) are supportive.

- ***A plurality believes the state's crime rate has increased over the past decade, and that there are too many people in prison in Wisconsin.***
 - Fully 49% of voters believe the state's crime rate has increased over the past decade, 35% believe it has stayed about the same, and just 8% believe it has decreased.
 - Fully 44% of voters believe there are too many people in prison, 27% believe the number of people in prison is about right, and just 13% believe there are not enough people in prison.

- ***By a wide margin, Wisconsin voters across party lines agree the state spends too much money on prisons and is crowding out funding for other priorities.***
 - By a 53%-35% margin, voters agree with the statement: "Wisconsin spends too much money on prisons, and that is crowding out funding for other pressing public safety priorities like local law enforcement, victim's services, and strict probation and parole."
 - Republicans (46%-35%), Independents (49%-38%), and Democrats (66%-31%) all agree.

- **After voters hear from both sides on prisons – those who believe the system is over-incarcerating people and those who believe a person who commits a crime should be behind bars – Wisconsin voters side with more effective, less expensive alternatives by more than a two-to-one margin.**
 - Voters were provided with the following two points of view on prisons: *“Some people say that with nearly 20,000 people in Wisconsin jails and prisons, that’s too many, and it costs the state too much money. There are more effective, less expensive alternatives to prison for non-violent offenders and expanding those alternatives is the best way to reduce the crime rate...while...other people say that any person who commits a crime belongs behind bars, end of story. It may cost a lot of money to run prisons, but it would cost society more in the long run if more criminals were out on the street.”*

After voters hear these two statements, they side with more effective, less expensive alternatives by a significant 66%-29% margin. Voters across party lines, including majorities of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats side with more effective, less expensive alternatives.

- **Nearly three-quarters of Wisconsin voters support reforms to reduce reliance on one-size-fits all prison sentences.**
 - After voters are given some background about reforms passed in states like Texas and Michigan, they are supportive of similar efforts by Wisconsin lawmakers to reduce reliance on one-size-fits all prison sentences while improving public safety by an overwhelming 73%-17% margin.
 - Republicans (65%-22%), Independents (73%-17%), and Democrats (80%-11%) all agree.
- **Nearly 80% of voters support sending fewer low risk, non-violent offenders to Wisconsin prisons so more money can be used to fund treatment and diversion programs.**
 - By a 79%-16% margin, Wisconsin voters support *“sending fewer low-risk, non-violent offenders to Wisconsin prisons so that more state funding can be used to fund alternative treatment and diversion programs, specifically for drug and alcohol abuse.”*
 - Republicans (68%-24%), Independents (81%-16%), and Democrats (87%-8%) all agree.
- **An overwhelming majority of Wisconsin voters believe the main goal of the criminal justice system should be rehabilitating people to become productive citizens.**
 - By an 86%-14% margin, Wisconsin voters agree *“The main goal of our criminal justice system should be rehabilitating people to become productive, law-abiding citizens.”*
 - Republicans (83%-16%), Independents (84%-16%), and Democrats (92%-8%) all agree.
- **Finally, a majority of voters support reducing the term individuals spend on supervision to help reduce the likelihood that person commits another crime.**
 - Voters were provided with the following two points of view on supervision length: *“Some people say Wisconsin often sentences individuals to longer periods of probation or parole than many other states and even the federal government....while...Other people say that community supervision should be as long as possible to ensure that individuals are avoiding criminal activity.”*

After voters hear these two statements, they side with reducing the term individuals spend on supervision to help reduce the likelihood that person commits another crime by a 53%-40% margin.