

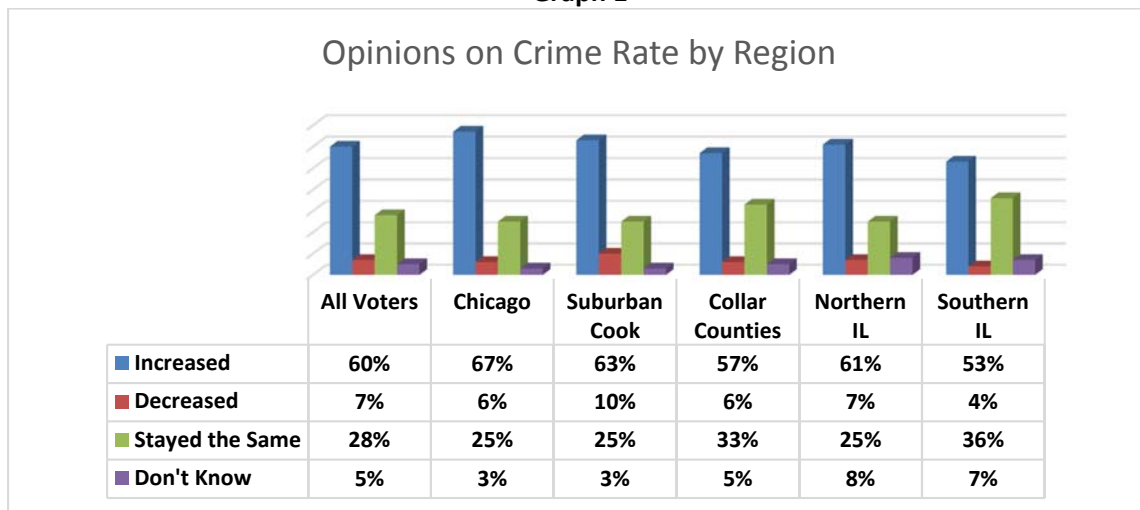
April 15, 2016

To: Illinois Justice Action Network
 From: Jane Rayburn, Research Director & Dave Fako, President, Fako Research & Strategies
 Re: IL Justice Action Network – Statewide Benchmark – Summary Memo

Voters Feel Too Many Incarcerated

Respondents were asked whether they felt that the crime rate in Illinois has increased or decreased, or stayed about the same, over the past ten years.

Graph 1



- *Despite a strong majority (60%) of respondents indicating they feel that the crime rate has increased over past ten years, half of voters (48%) indicate their belief that there are too many people in prison.*
 - *A majority of Democrats (63%), plurality of Independents (43%), and third of Republicans (30%) believe that there are too many people in prison in Illinois. A majority of voters under fifty (54%) and Minority voters (60%), especially African Americans (82%) indicate they believe that there are too many people in prison in Illinois.*

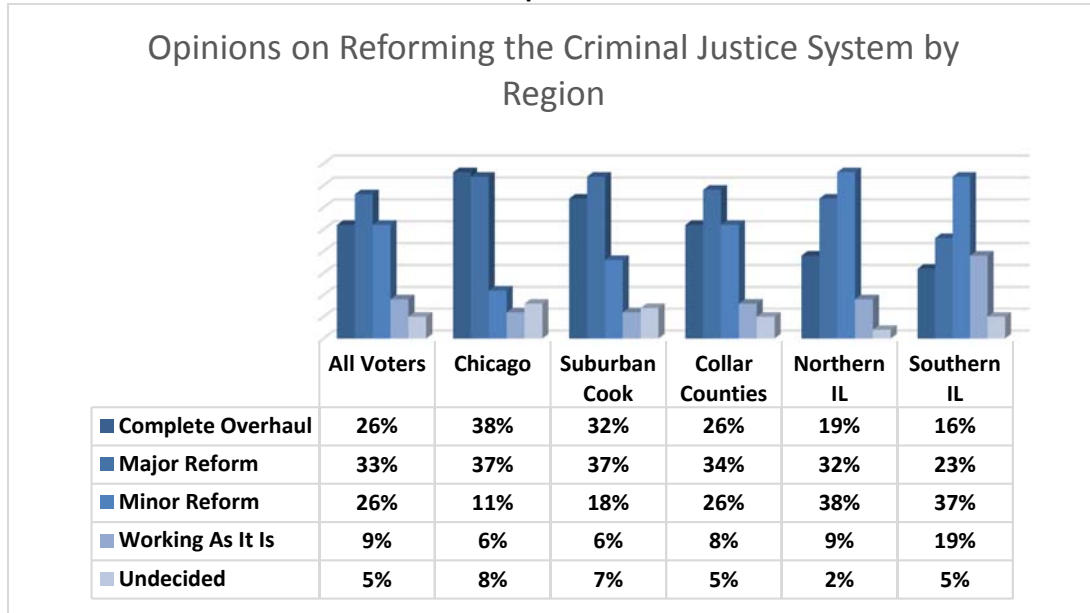
Strong Majority of Illinois Voters Support Criminal Justice Reform

Respondents were asked the following question regarding the need for reform of the Illinois criminal justice system (Refer to Figure 1).

Figure 1

Generally speaking do you feel that the Illinois criminal justice system needs a complete overhaul, a major reform, a minor reform [ROTATE CHOICES] or do you think it is working pretty well as it is?

Graph 2



- One-quarter (26%) of voters believe the Illinois criminal justice system needs “A Complete Overhaul.” One-third of voters (33%) believe that the Illinois criminal justice system needs “Major Reform” while another quarter of the electorate (26%) feels the system needs “Minor Reform.” One-tenth of voters (9%) feel that the Illinois criminal justice system is “Working Pretty Well As It Is.”

Respondents were asked which of the following two statements came closest to their point of view regarding prison sentences (Refer to Figure 2).

Figure 2

Illinois has some of the most overcrowded prisons in the country and that our system needs to be reformed. Other states have created more effective, less expensive alternatives to prison for non-violent offenders, and Illinois should consider making those changes to our system to save money and lower our crime rate.

Or

People who commit any crime belong 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.

- A solid majority (70%) of Illinois voters agree with the first statement that Illinois prisons are overcrowded, requiring reform for non-violent offenders. Less than a quarter (22%) of voters agree more closely with the second statement that all criminals should be behind bars, end of story.
- Likewise, a strong majority of Democrats (72%), Independents (76%), and Republicans (63%) indicate that their opinion comes closest to the first statement, that Illinois prisons are overcrowded.

Various points advocating reform of the criminal justice system were assessed. A majority of respondents agreed with all items. The points that resonated with the top issue concern (budget) received strong agreement from voters, though all items were agreeable to a strong majority of voters.

- The following points were the most agreeable to voters:
 - *We should break down barriers for ex-offenders so they can get jobs, support their families, and stop being dependent on government services that cost Illinois taxpayers money.* (90% Total Agree¹, 64% Strongly Agree)
 - *People convicted of possessing a small amount of drugs shouldn't automatically go to prison, but have the chance at participating in probation and drug treatment.* (87% Agree, 69% Strongly Agree)
 - *Prisons are a government spending program, and just like any other government spending program, they need to be put to the cost-benefit test to make sure Illinois taxpayers are getting the best bang for their buck.* (85% Agree, 53% Strongly Agree)
 - *Some of the money Illinois is spending on locking up nonviolent offenders should be shifted to strengthening mandatory community supervision programs like probation and parole.* (85% Total Agree, 52% Strongly Agree)

Voters Support Wide Variety of Reform, Rehabilitation Topping List

Seven specific courses of action to reform the state's criminal justice system were presented to respondents who indicated whether they supported or opposed each item. All courses of action were supported by a strong majority of voters with significant intensity behind that support. Specifically, courses of action that included a rehabilitation, diversion, or reduction of recidivism component are the most strongly supported. This largely echoes the voters' sentiments that there are too many people currently incarcerated in the state of Illinois.

- The following courses of actions receive the most support from voters:
 - *Offer more rehabilitation and job training for low-level, non-violent offenders so that when they re-enter society, they can get jobs, turn away from crime, and get off the taxpayers' dime.* (94% Total Support, 76% Strongly Support)
 - *Reduce prison time for low-risk, non-violent offenders in Illinois prisons and re-invest some of those savings to create a stronger probation and parole system that holds offenders accountable for their crimes.* (92% Total Support, 65% Strongly Support)
 - *Regarding this course of action, there is nearly universal support among Democrats (92%), Independents (93%), and Republicans (96%).*

¹ Total Agree is defined as Strongly Agree + Somewhat Agree

- *Replace mandatory minimum sentences with sentencing ranges so that judges can weigh the individual circumstances of each case, such as seriousness of the offense and the offender’s criminal history, when determining the penalty. (87% Total Support, 61% Strongly Support)*
 - *Democrats (89%), Independents (86%), and Republicans (91%) all support this course of action.*
 - *Reform marijuana laws so that those who possess or use marijuana are provided alternatives to incarceration such as probation and treatment options. (83% Total Support, 62% Strongly Support)*
 - *Send fewer low-risk, non-violent offenders to Illinois prisons so that state funding can be used to keep violent criminals in prison for their full sentence. (83% Total Support, 60% Strongly Support)*
- Nearly two-thirds of voters (63%) indicate that knowledge of their state legislator’s support of all the courses of action to reform the state’s criminal justice system would make them **more likely** to re-elect them while only 5% state it would make them **less likely** to re-elect their representative. One-quarter of voters (27%) indicate it would make **no difference** in their vote for their state legislator.

In conclusion, advocates for criminal justice reform find an electorate that is primed and open-minded to change in Illinois. Despite a majority recognizing that crime rates are increasing, Illinois voters feel that there are too many people incarcerated in the state, and their concern around that largely echoes their overall primary issue concern – the state budget. Various reasons advocating for reform were agreeable to a strong majority of voters, with nearly all finding some intensity in that level of agreeableness. Likewise, specific courses of action were well received, and voters largely and intensely support these proposals. Legislators who support these reforms also find favor with this electorate with two-thirds of voters indicating that it would make them more likely to re-elect an elected official who supported them. In all, the state is highly receptive to sundry and widespread criminal justice reform.

Methodology: This report presents the findings of a survey taken among registered voters within the State of Illinois. Illinois Justice Action Network commissioned the survey. Fako Research & Strategies, of Lemont, Illinois and Boston, Massachusetts conducted the survey by telephone on February 1-4, 2015 using professional interviewers. FR&S interviewed a random sample of 505 registered voters within the State of Illinois. A strict screening process was used to ensure that only registered voters in the State of Illinois participated in the survey. The interviews lasted an average of 16 minutes. Scientific sampling techniques using a listing of registered voters were used to give all voters living in a telephone-equipped household, or with a listed cell phone number within the State of Illinois, an equal chance of being interviewed. Cellular phones were included within the sample and accounted for 25% (127 Completed Interviews) of all weighted interviews. The interviews were conducted in proportion to gender and regional shares of the vote based on past election data and known demographics. Weighting was applied to age, gender, race, and region to bring these groups into closer proportion to known demographics. The survey has an overall margin of error of +/- 4.31 % at the 95% level of confidence. This means that if the survey were replicated the results would be consistent for 95 out of 100 cases. The margin of error is higher among the various sub-groups.