



New Poll Shows Strong, Bipartisan Support for Criminal Justice Reforms in West Virginia

Recent polling of West Virginia voters demonstrates broad support for criminal justice reform in the state, including strong support for policies that safely reduce the prison population. Two in 3 voters including 2 in 3 Republican voters support criminal justice reform, and nearly 7 in 10 voters and 6 in 10 Republicans believe it is important to reduce the jail and prison population in the state.

Specific proposals to safely reduce the prison population also have strong, bipartisan support. Three in four West Virginia voters would support a “Second Look” policy that would allow judges to review the cases of people sentenced to long prison terms for a crime committed as youth, including 73% of Republican voters.

These results come at a time when West Virginia is spending more to incarcerate a single person annually than the average income for someone working in the state, costing taxpayers over \$270 million on the prison system alone. Voters recognize that spending taxpayer dollars to keep people who don’t pose a threat to public safety in prison is not an effective use of public funds.

Key Survey Findings:

West Virginia Voters Believe that The Criminal Justice System is Not Working and Overwhelmingly Support Reducing the State’s Jail and Prison Populations

- Two in 3 voters (66%) support criminal justice reform in West Virginia. These results are consistent across political party affiliations, with 66% of Republican voters supporting criminal justice reform compared to only 14% who oppose.
- Voters believe the best way to keep West Virginia communities safe is through investment in prevention, housing, job training, and drug and mental health treatment (65%) rather than increased jail and prison sentences (32%).
- Results indicate that West Virginia voters oppose harsh penalties for drug offenses and think these measures will not effectively address drug problems in the state. Six in 10 voters support reducing criminal penalties for possession of controlled substances and treating drug use as a public health issue, including a majority (56%) of Republicans. Further, 65% of voters and 6 in 10 Republicans support eliminating mandatory minimums for drug offenses.

Criminal Justice Reform Is a Winning Political Issue

- Criminal justice reform is also a winning political strategy as 67% of voters indicate they are more likely to vote for a candidate for state legislature who supports criminal justice reform in the state.

Such support is consistent across party lines with 69% of Republicans saying they are more likely compared to 68% of Democrat voters and 60% of Independents.

- Likewise, 63% of Republicans would be more likely to vote to re-elect Governor Patrick Morrissey if he supported criminal justice reform.
- When voters hear of President Trump’s criminal justice reforms on the national level (passed in 2018) 60% of voters say they are more likely to support similar legislation in West Virginia. In fact, 72% of Republicans surveyed say they are more likely to support similar criminal justice reform legislation in West Virginia after hearing about President Trump’s First Step Act.

Second Look Sentencing Reform Has Strong Support Among Voters Across the Political Spectrum

- Three-fourths (75%) of all West Virginia voters support Second Look legislation in the state. This includes 73% of Republican voters, 79% of Democrats, and 72% of Independents who support the legislation.
- Voters were also asked their opinions on other potential criminal justice reforms. Every policy tested had majority support across political party affiliations.

| Policy | Total Support | GOP Support | Dem. Support | Ind. Support |
|--|---------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| Increasing the amount of time that people can earn off their probation or parole term if they comply with the rules of supervision and do not commit a new offense | 79% | 77% | 84% | 74% |
| Increasing the amount of time that people can earn off their prison sentence for following prison rules and participating in rehabilitation programs | 78% | 75% | 83% | 76% |
| Automatically clear the criminal records of people convicted of nonviolent offenses who have completed their sentence and not been rearrested for 5 years | 77% | 76% | 82% | 72% |
| Ending the practice of keeping people in jail before their trial if they have been charged with a nonviolent offense | 68% | 65% | 76% | 62% |

| | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Allowing more people to be considered for compassionate release from prison if they have a terminal illness or are medically incapacitated | 66% | 62% | 74% | 62% |
| Eliminate mandatory minimums for drug offenses that require a set prison sentence rather than allowing judges to determine the appropriate punishment | 65% | 61% | 68% | 69% |
| Reducing criminal penalties for possession of controlled substances and treating drug use as a public health issue | 63% | 56% | 73% | 63% |

Question Wording and Results

Support for Criminal Justice Reform – “Do you support or oppose criminal justice reform in West Virginia?”

| | Total | GOP | Democrats | Independents |
|-----------------------|-------|-----|-----------|--------------|
| Strongly Support | 30% | 29% | 35% | 22% |
| Somewhat Support | 37% | 37% | 36% | 38% |
| Somewhat Oppose | 8% | 7% | 8% | 10% |
| Strongly Oppose | 6% | 6% | 6% | 6% |
| Don't know/NA/Refused | 20% | 20% | 16% | 24% |

Voters Believe it is Important to Reduce the Jail and Prison Population in the State – “How important do you believe it is to reduce the jail and prison population in West Virginia?”

| | Total | GOP | Democrats | Independents |
|-----------------------|-------|-----|-----------|--------------|
| Very Important | 35% | 27% | 44% | 38% |
| Somewhat Important | 34% | 34% | 35% | 32% |
| Not Very Important | 13% | 18% | 6% | 11% |
| Not at all Important | 10% | 14% | 8% | 8% |
| Don't know/NA/Refused | 8% | 8% | 7% | 11% |

Support for Second Look Legislation – “Some West Virginia lawmakers are considering a Second Look resentencing policy that would allow a judge to reduce a person’s sentence for a crime committed before their 25th birthday if they’ve already served at least 10 years in prison. All decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis, and the judge has to find that the person is no longer a danger to the community, poses no credible risk of future criminal conduct, or has shown they can return to society and the judge believes the sentence should be reduced. Do you support or oppose this policy in West Virginia?”

| | Total | GOP | Democrats | Independents |
|-----------------------|-------|-----|-----------|--------------|
| Strongly Support | 29% | 28% | 33% | 24% |
| Somewhat Support | 46% | 45% | 46% | 47% |
| Somewhat Oppose | 10% | 11% | 10% | 10% |
| Strongly Oppose | 10% | 11% | 9% | 9% |
| Don't know/NA/Refused | 5% | 5% | 2% | 9% |

Electoral Strength of President Trump’s Criminal Justice Reform – “If you knew President Trump supported criminal justice reform in his first term in office including commutations for some people serving federal prison sentences for drug crimes and signing the First Step Act, which allowed more people to earn time off their sentence for participating in rehabilitation programs would you be more or less likely to support similar criminal justice reform in West Virginia?”

| | Total | GOP | Democrats | Independents |
|-----------------------|-------|-----|-----------|--------------|
| Much More Likely | 24% | 30% | 17% | 20% |
| Somewhat More Likely | 37% | 42% | 29% | 37% |
| Somewhat Less Likely | 12% | 10% | 15% | 12% |
| Much Less Likely | 14% | 8% | 25% | 10% |
| Don't know/NA/Refused | 13% | 10% | 13% | 21% |

Criminal Justice Reform is a Winning Political Strategy

“And would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate for state legislature representing your area if he or she supported criminal justice reform?”

| | Total | GOP | Democrats | Independents |
|-----------------------|-------|-----|-----------|--------------|
| Much More Likely | 20% | 29% | 15% | 11% |
| Somewhat More Likely | 47% | 40% | 54% | 49% |
| Somewhat Less Likely | 12% | 13% | 12% | 10% |
| Much Less Likely | 6% | 4% | 8% | 6% |
| Don't know/NA/Refused | 16% | 14% | 12% | 24% |

“Would you be more or less likely to vote to re-elect Patrick Morrisey governor of West Virginia if he supported criminal justice reform?”

| | Total | GOP | Democrats | Independents |
|-----------------------|-------|-----|-----------|--------------|
| Much More Likely | 16% | 23% | 11% | 10% |
| Somewhat More Likely | 35% | 40% | 28% | 34% |
| Somewhat Less Likely | 11% | 12% | 9% | 15% |
| Much Less Likely | 21% | 12% | 34% | 17% |
| Don't know/NA/Refused | 17% | 13% | 18% | 24% |

Voters Believe the Best Way to Keep West Virginia Communities Safe is Through Investment in Prevention – “Which of the following statements comes closest to your opinion?”

| | Total | GOP | Democrats | Independents |
|---|-------|-----|-----------|--------------|
| The best way to keep our communities safe is to invest in policing and increase jail and prison sentences for people who break the law | 32% | 41% | 18% | 33% |
| The best way to keep our communities safe is to invest in prevention and increase funding for programs such as affordable housing, job training, and drug and mental health treatment | 65% | 54% | 80% | 62% |
| Don't know/NA/Refused | 4% | 5% | 2% | 4% |

Methodology: A 15-minute survey of 500 voters in West Virginia was conducted March 2025. Interviews were distributed according to actual WV voter distributions by region, gender, party and other demographics. Interviews were conducted among landline and high-use cell phone respondents via live telephone interviews and online. Sampling controls and slight weighting were used to ensure a representative population. Question wording rotated as required to avoid sequencing bias. Percentages in this summary may not add up to 100 due to rounding and refusals. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls. The survey was sponsored by FWD.us and conducted by MBE Research.