

National Voter Survey
Summary Memo
Re: Voter Preferences on Candidate Criminal Justice Positions



David Binder Research

Methodology: David Binder Research conducted a nationwide survey of 600 likely voters between August 23rd and August 29th, 2018. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and English, with respondents choosing their language of preference. About half of interviews were completed by cell phone and half by landline, and the margin of error is $\pm 4.0\%$.

Vote Select: Interviews were conducted with likely November 2018 voters, based on previous vote history and self-reported likelihood to vote.

Key Findings

Likely November 2018 midterm voters are much more likely to support candidates who take strong positions to reform the criminal justice system, with support from across the political spectrum. For many positions, support comes from unexpected groups, such as Republicans and voters who approve of President Donald Trump or reside in more conservative regions of the country.

Further, when given a choice between two candidates with starkly different views on criminal justice reform, 55% of voters would choose a “smart justice” candidate who believes that our criminal justice system can be made fairer, safer and cheaper through decarceration and reducing racial disparities, whereas only about one-third would choose a candidate espousing traditional “tough-on-crime” criminal justice views.

- 1. Large majorities of voters are more likely to support a candidate who broadly supports criminal justice reform and who backs that up with strong stances on reducing racial disparities in the criminal justice system, ending the war on drugs, police reform, and reducing incarceration.** Only 6% of likely voters nationwide would oppose a candidate that backs policies to ensure all police officers treat people of all races fairly and are held accountable for misconduct.

I’m going to read you a few statements to describe candidates. For each, please tell me if you would be more likely to support or oppose this person as your local representative.			
SUMMARY TABLE: Statement	Total Support	Total Oppose	Net Support
A candidate who supports policies to ensure that all police officers respect the constitution and treat people of all races fairly, and ensuring that police officers are held accountable for misconduct.	90	6	+84
A candidate who supports making it easier for people released from prison to find a job and housing.	85	8	+77
A candidate who supports criminal justice reform.	78	10	+68
A candidate who supports reducing racial disparities in the criminal justice system and speaks out against such inequalities.	75	18	+57
A candidate who supports ending the war on drugs.	71	20	+51
A candidate who supports restoring the right to vote for any person who has served their prison sentence.	64	28	+36
A candidate who supports reducing the number of people in jails and prisons.	59	28	+31

2. Candidates supporting criminal justice reform receive very high support from growing voter blocks (such as millennials) and strong support from segments of voters that conventional Washington DC political wisdom would say opposed criminal justice reform:

- ✓ A candidate who supports criminal justice reform
 - South, 79% more likely to support
 - Crime victim*, 78% more likely to support (*Someone who says, in the last 10 years, they or a friend or family member have been a victim of a crime)
 - Rural areas, 74% more likely to support
 - Approve of Trump's job performance, 73% more likely to support
 - Non-college men, 73% more likely to support
- ✓ A candidate who supports reducing racial disparities in the criminal justice system and speaks out against such inequalities.
 - White voters , 78% more likely to support
 - White Republicans, 67% more likely to support
 - Midwest and Southern voters, 73% more likely to support
 - Republicans, 63% more likely to support
 - Approve of Trump's job performance, 61% more likely to support
- ✓ A candidate who supports reducing the number of people in jails and prisons.
 - Millennials, 75% more likely to support
 - Suburban voters, 68% more likely to support
- ✓ A candidate who supports ending the war on drugs.
 - Approve of Trump's job performance, 70% more likely to support
 - Boomers (Age 54-72), 68% more likely to support
- ✓ A candidate who supports policies to ensure that all police officers respect the constitution and treat people of all races fairly, and ensuring that police officers are held accountable for misconduct.
 - Not incarcerated*, 90% more likely to support (*Answers "No" to: In the last 10 years, have you, or a friend or family member, been incarcerated in jail or prison?)
 - White Republicans, 86% more likely to support
 - Approve of Trump's job performance, 84% more likely to support
- ✓ A candidate who supports making it easier for people released from prison to find a job and housing.
 - Millennials, 95% more likely to support
 - Crime victims, 87% more likely to support
 - Approve of Trump's job performance, 80% more likely to support
 - White non-college grads, 80% more likely to support
- ✓ A candidate who supports restoring the right to vote for any person who has served their prison sentence.
 - Millennials and Generation X voters, 73% more likely to support
 - Crime victim, 69% more likely to support
 - South, 64% more likely to support
 - Republican men, 56% more likely to support

3. **A majority of voters choose a reform-focused, or “smart justice”, candidate over a traditional candidate.** Importantly, the candidate statement for the traditional candidate was purposely made very strong, using language currently being used by candidates nationwide (and provided in the text box to the right). 55% would choose a candidate that believes our criminal justice system can be made fairer, safer, and cheaper by reducing the number of people in jails and prisons and reducing racial disparities. Only 33% choose a candidate with tough-on-crime beliefs.

- ✓ The intensity in those *strongly* preferring the Smart Justice candidate (39% strongly) is nearly twice as strong as those *strongly* preferring a Tough on Crime candidate (21% strongly).
- ✓ Majorities across many groups chose the Smart Justice candidate, including 53% among White voters and 53% in the Midwest.
- ✓ There is a strikingly strong preference for the Smart Justice candidate from Democrats under 45 (83%) and suburban men (71%).
- ✓ Among victims of crime, support is stronger (59% support) for a Smart Justice candidate, with only one-third (33%) preferring a Tough on Crime candidate.

The poll posed the following question to likely voters:

If you had to choose between two candidates, which would you choose...

A candidate who believes our current criminal justice system is unnecessarily ruining lives and wasting money by locking up too many people in prison for too long, with little benefit for public safety. This candidate believes that our criminal justice system can be made fairer, safer and cheaper by reducing the number of people in jails and prisons and reducing racial disparities.

A candidate who believes the current number of people locked up in jails and prisons is fine and that, if anything, we need to spend more money on jails and prisons to ensure that all criminals do time behind bars. This candidate believes that reducing the use of incarceration would be dangerous, and that racial disparities in the criminal justice system, if they exist, are simply a result of where crime is occurring and not a problem that can or should be fixed.