



The Opportunity Survey: Criminal Justice Findings

A large majority of Americans see major flaws in the current criminal justice system, and there is broad support for a range of policies and programs to reform the system and improve outcomes for formerly incarcerated people upon re-entry. Findings from [The Opportunity Survey](#) include:

- ▶ Sixty percent of the American public believes that the unequal treatment of people who have served a prison sentence is a serious problem.
- ▶ Forty-eight percent of Americans would be willing to get involved in efforts promoting the fair treatment of minorities in the criminal justice system (but only 2 percent already do).
- ▶ Eighty-six percent of Americans say stop-and-search policies based on race and ethnicity should not be permitted, including 63 percent who think system-wide training programs are needed to avoid racial or ethnic profiling. (The rest prefer retraining of individual officers.)
- ▶ Regarding alternative sentencing for those convicted of nonviolent crimes, about half think such programs (i.e., offering probation, treatment, counseling, and payment of damages instead of prison time) should be increased, 43 percent think they should be kept about the same, and just 9 percent favor cutting them back.
- ▶ Majorities support policies to help people who've previously been imprisoned find jobs: 67 percent back increased spending on job training and job placement for the formerly imprisoned, 56 percent support laws restricting hiring discrimination against them, and 55 percent favor tax incentives for employers to hire them.
- ▶ In terms of drug laws, 52 percent favor legalization of marijuana for personal use, while 92 percent think cocaine possession should remain illegal. Of those who think cocaine possession should be illegal, far more favor drug treatment programs (73 percent) or a fine (69 percent) compared to jail time (53 percent). Among other options, 56 percent favor community service, while 47 percent favor probation.
- ▶ Support for prison reforms and anti-poverty policies are closely linked: People in favor of anti-poverty measures are 36 points more likely to highly support criminal justice reforms and job aid for people who have been incarcerated. And those who support laws restricting hiring discrimination against former prisoners are 26 points more likely than others to highly prioritize increasing the minimum wage.
- ▶ Those who strongly support criminal justice reform are 42 percent more likely to favor an unrestricted path to citizenship, and those who are likely to take action (or already are doing so) to support a path to citizenship also are 36 to 49 percent more willing than others to act in support of fair treatment of minorities in the justice system.
- ▶ Those who believe that housing discrimination is a widespread problem for people who have been imprisoned, blacks, undocumented immigrants, and Latinos are more likely—by double-digit margins—to support jobs programs for formerly incarcerated individuals, back alternative sentencing, and favor greater rehabilitation efforts.