



Kansas Criminal Justice Public Opinion Survey

Kansas policymakers are looking for ways to increase public safety and to manage corrections spending and growth in the prison population. In response to a projected 26 percent increase in the state's prison population over the next 10 years, the Senate President and Speaker of the House established the Joint Task Force on Comprehensive Corrections to determine how best to use taxpayer dollars to fight crime.

The joint and bipartisan task force requested technical assistance from the Council of State Governments Justice Center to ensure its deliberations were data-driven and based on the latest research. As part of that assistance, the Justice Center commissioned an exhaustive review of data on the criminal justice system by national experts with support from the U.S. Department of Justice.

In addition, the Council of State Governments Justice Center and The Pew Charitable Trusts' Public Safety Performance Project commissioned the following public opinion survey which assesses the public's knowledge of current criminal justice and sentencing policies, current concern about crime, and preferred approaches to fighting crime and dealing with the rising prison population.

Key Findings

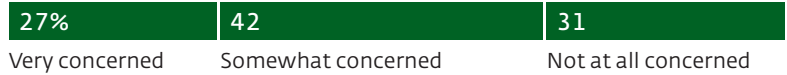
- Although Kansans are concerned about crime, those polled rank the economy, education, and health care as the most pressing problems facing the state.
- Kansans generally believe that more people are in prison today than there were 10 years ago, which is consistent with recent trends: there are 8,900 people in Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC) facilities today, compared to 7,800 10 years ago.
- Despite the passage of truth-in-sentencing laws 14 years ago mandating that offenders serve 80 percent of their sentence in prison and "Jessica's Law" last year, which requires people convicted of sex crimes against children to serve 25 years in prison, most Kansans continue to believe that people sentenced to prison today serve less time in prison than they did 10 years ago and that people convicted of child molestation receive shorter sentences than required by law.
- Kansans believe that getting people who are incarcerated treatment for drug addiction and training for jobs is "very important," and they believe people in state prison indeed have access to such programs. In fact, most offenders released from KDOC facilities today have not participated in such programs: three-quarters of offenders in need of vocational education, and half of those offenders in need of substance abuse treatment, do not participate in these programs before their release.
- When told that the prison population is growing, Kansans agree that building new prisons is necessary. But, when told that strategies such as keeping offenders from failing on probation and ending up in prison could be employed to avert growth in the population, Kansans overwhelmingly prefer these strategies or the combination of these strategies with some prison construction over only building more prisons.

Concern About Crime

What is the most important problem facing Kansas today?



To what extent are you concerned about crime in your community?



What should be our top priority for dealing with crime in Kansas?



Perception of Current Sentencing Policies

Based on Kansas laws adopted during the past two years, are sentences for serious and violent offenders becoming:

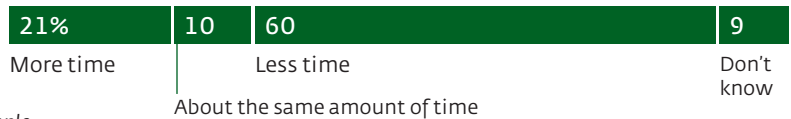


According to the current law, how many years do you think someone convicted of first-time child molestation is required to serve in Kansas?



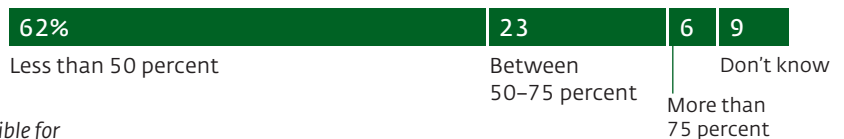
(“Jessica’s Law” passed in 2006 imposes a 25 year minimum sentence for child sex offenders.)

Do you think people serve more or less time in prison than they did 10 years ago?



(Over the last 10 years, the overall sentence length for people in prison increased by an average of 2 months. Sentences for people convicted of the most severe non-drug offenses increased by 15–50% depending on the severity level. Sentences for people convicted of drug offenses in three categories increased, while the average sentence for one category of drug sentences decreased.)

When people are sentenced to prison, what percent of their sentence do you think most people serve behind bars on average?



(Since 1993, people sentenced to prison terms have not been eligible for release by the parole board. Those sentenced between 1993 and 1995 are required to serve 80 percent of their sentence in prison. Those sentenced after 1995 are required to serve 85 percent of their sentence in prison.)

Importance of Treatment and Job Training in Prison

Do most people have access to drug treatment before their release?



How important is it that people get drug treatment in prison?



Do you think that most people in prison have access to vocational education before their release?

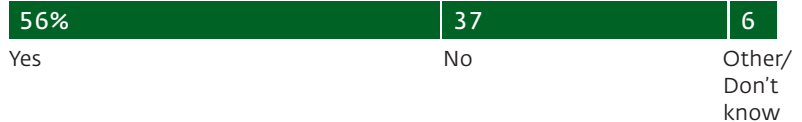


How important is it that people get job training in prison?

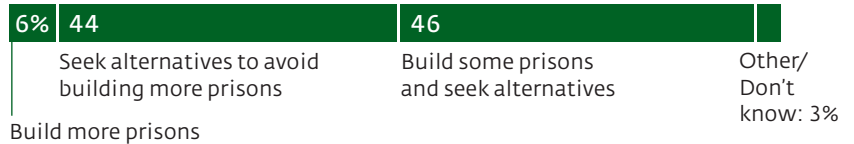


Preferred Approach to the Rising Prison Population

Because of tougher laws passed by the legislature, the prison population is growing. Do you think the state should build more prisons?



In order to build and operate additional prison beds, it will cost \$500 million over 10 years. Alternatively, the state could avoid having to build prisons by keeping offenders from failing on probation and ending up in prison. Which strategy should the state pursue?



About the Justice Center and the Public Safety Performance Project

The Council of State Governments Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. The Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus-driven strategies, informed by available evidence, to increase public safety and strengthen communities.

Support for this project was provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts. Working with the Justice Center and other partners, Pew's Public Safety Performance Project provides nonpartisan research, analysis and expertise to help states identify data-driven, fiscally responsible options for protecting public safety, holding offenders accountable, and controlling corrections costs. For more information about the project, visit: www.pewpublicsafety.org.

Findings stated in this document do not necessarily represent the official position of The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Council of State Governments or its members.

How the Poll Was Conducted

The Kansas Criminal Justice Public Opinion Survey is based on telephone interviews conducted February 2 through February 28, 2007 with 500 adults throughout Kansas. The sample initially consisted of 2,315 randomly selected Kansas telephone numbers. In the sample 979 potential respondents refused to complete the survey. The response rate for the survey was 22 percent, which is in line with industry averages. The poll has 95 percent confidence with a margin of error of +/-4 percentage points. The margin of error reflects the interval in which the data collected from this survey would be within +/- 4 percent of the distributions reported in 95 out of 100 surveys conducted among adults in Kansas. Donald P. Haider-Markel and the Survey Research Center at the Institute for Policy and Social Research at the University of Kansas oversaw the polling and analysis.

Council of State Governments Justice Center

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Other documents generated as part of the Justice Center's technical assistance to Kansas policymakers are available on the Justice Center's website at:

http://justicecenter.csg.org/resources/justice_reinvestment/