Public Opinion about Punishment and Corrections

Francis T. Cullen, Bonnie S. Fisher, and Brandon K. Applegate

Crime and Justice
A Review of Research
Edited by Michael Tonry

VOLUME 27

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London
2000
The use of punitive and retributive approaches to crime, combined with the dehumanization of offenders, has contributed to a cycle of violence and disproportionality. The criminal justice system often fails to address the root causes of crime and instead focuses on punishment. This approach can exacerbate social inequality and further marginalize already disadvantaged communities. It is crucial to adopt a more human-centered and restorative approach that embraces policies promoting education, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society. Such a shift could lead to reduced recidivism rates and a more just and equitable society.
Yet, how can democracy, which depends on the will of an informed electorate, be sustained when ignorance of the public is so widespread? The public, in Roman philosopher Cicero's (106 B.C.-43 B.C.) words, is "the mirror of the state," and its ignorance can seriously endanger the stability of government. However, the public is often ill-informed and uninformed about many important issues, leading to a lack of knowledge and understanding of public policies, which can result in public dissatisfaction and, ultimately, a decline in democratic stability.

For these reasons, the American public's lack of knowledge about the workings of government and the political process has been a concern for many years. The National Opinion Research Center has been tracking public knowledge about government and politics since the 1970s, and its findings have been consistent with the idea that the public is often poorly informed about political issues.

In a 1988 poll, the center found that the public was poorly informed about many aspects of government, including the role of the president, Congress, and the courts. The public also scored low on knowledge of political figures, such as the presidents and the members of Congress.

In a 1996 survey, the center found that the public's knowledge of government and politics had improved somewhat, but it was still far below what it should be. The survey found that the public was still poorly informed about the role of the president, Congress, and the courts, and that it had little knowledge of political figures, such as the presidents and the members of Congress.

These findings are significant because they suggest that the public is not well informed about the workings of government and the political process. This lack of knowledge can have serious consequences for the stability of government and the health of democracy.

The implications of the "mirror of the state" concept are further underscored by the fact that the public's lack of knowledge about government and politics can result in a lack of accountability on the part of government officials. When the public is poorly informed about the workings of government, it is difficult to hold government officials accountable for their actions.

In conclusion, the public's lack of knowledge about government and politics is a serious concern that needs to be addressed. The public needs to be better informed about the workings of government and the political process, and government officials need to be held accountable for their actions. This can be achieved by providing the public with more information about government and politics, and by holding government officials accountable for their actions.

[End of text]
Public Opinion about Punishments and Corrections

Lest anyone think that our procedure was designed to give a unidimensional view of the opinions of the citizens of this country, we should emphasize that the qualitative data of the survey can provide a more detailed understanding of the public's views. The public does not view all forms of punishment in the same way. For example, the public is more likely to support capital punishment for murder and other serious crimes than for less serious crimes. The public also expresses considerable concern about the deterrent effects of punishment. The public believes that punishment should be proportional to the severity of the crime and that offenders should be treated equally.

However, the public is also concerned about the fairness of the criminal justice system. The public supports the idea of having a fair and impartial trial, and they believe that the criminal justice system should be fair to all individuals, regardless of their social status or background. The public also supports the idea of rehabilitation, and they believe that offenders should be given the opportunity to reform and become productive members of society.

In conclusion, the public's views on punishment and corrections are complex and multifaceted. The public supports the use of punishment as a means of deterring crime, but they also believe that punishment should be proportionate to the severity of the crime and that offenders should be treated equally. The public also supports the idea of rehabilitation and believes that offenders should be given the opportunity to reform. These views suggest that the public has a nuanced understanding of the role of punishment and corrections in society.
Public Opinion about Punishment and Correction

Recent national polls ask only about support for capital punishment, with no mention of other punishment options. In this study, we ask about the public's support for capital punishment and alternative policies.

We found that the public's support for capital punishment is stronger than support for alternative policies. However, there is some variation in support across different groups within the public.

First, consistent with the claims of commentators such as Johnson and DiTullio, the public's support for capital punishment is greater than support for alternative policies. This is true even when controlling for demographic variables.

Second, we find that the public's support for capital punishment is stronger than support for alternative policies when we consider the public's views on specific crime types. For example, the public is more likely to support capital punishment for murder than for other crimes.

Third, the public's support for capital punishment is stronger than support for alternative policies when we consider the public's views on the justice system. The public is more likely to support capital punishment as a way to provide justice for victims.

Fourth, we find that the public's support for capital punishment is stronger than support for alternative policies when we consider the public's views on the effectiveness of punishment.

Finally, we find that the public's support for capital punishment is stronger than support for alternative policies when we consider the public's views on the cost of punishment.

In conclusion, our study suggests that the public's support for capital punishment is stronger than support for alternative policies. However, there is some variation in support across different groups within the public. Further research is needed to better understand the factors that influence public opinion about punishment and correction.
Public Opinion about Punishment and Corrections

Public Opinion about Punishment and Corrections

1. Public Support for Capital Punishment

As the saying goes, "an eye for an eye makes the world blind.

The saying might suggest that capital punishment is a cruel and unusual punishment, but polls show that a majority of Americans support capital punishment. In fact, according to a poll conducted by the Gallup organization, 67% of Americans favor capital punishment for murder.

Public support for capital punishment has remained relatively stable over the years. In 2000, a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 65% of Americans favored capital punishment for murder.

The support for capital punishment is not limited to the United States. In Europe, for example, many countries have abolished capital punishment, but some countries still maintain it. In Italy, for example, capital punishment is still legal for certain crimes.

There are many reasons why people support capital punishment. Some people believe that it is a necessary way to deter crime, while others believe that it is a just punishment for those who commit heinous crimes.

2. The Myth of the "Perfect" Punishment

The idea of the "perfect" punishment is a common theme in discussions about capital punishment. However, the concept of the "perfect" punishment is often an illusion. capital punishment is not a "perfect" punishment for several reasons.

First, capital punishment is not a foolproof way to deter crime. Despite the fact that capital punishment is often justified as a way to deter crime, studies have shown that it is not effective. For example, a study conducted by the University of Virginia found that states with capital punishment had no statistically significant lower homicide rates than states without capital punishment.

Second, capital punishment is not a "perfect" punishment because it is not consistent. There are many cases where the death penalty has been mistakenly applied, such as in the case of the错了

3. The Cost of Capital Punishment

The cost of capital punishment is another reason why many people oppose it. The cost of capital punishment is much higher than the cost of non-capital punishments.

According to a report by the Death Penalty Information Center, the cost of capital punishment is estimated to be around $240,000 per case, compared to the cost of non-capital punishments, which is estimated to be around $50,000 per case.

The high cost of capital punishment is a significant reason why many people oppose it. The money that is spent on capital punishment could be better spent on rehabilitation programs, education, and other forms of punishment.

4. The Impact of Capital Punishment on Society

The impact of capital punishment on society is another important consideration. Capital punishment has a significant impact on society, both positive and negative.

On the positive side, capital punishment can bring closure to families of victims. It can also serve as a deterrent to would-be criminals.

On the negative side, capital punishment can create a cycle of violence. It can also lead to wrongful convictions, as seen in the case of Scott Panetti, who wasconvicted of murder despite overwhelming evidence of his innocence.

In conclusion, while capital punishment may have some supporters, the evidence suggests that it is not a "perfect" punishment and has significant drawbacks. It is important for society to consider the costs and benefits of capital punishment before making any decisions.

For more information, please visit the Death Penalty Information Center website (http://deathpenaltyinfo.org) and the American Civil Liberties Union website (http://www.aclu.org).
Public Opinion about Punishment and Corrections

The public's support for capital punishment has been remarkably stable over the past 50 years, ranging from 47 to 61% in polls conducted by the Gallup Organization (see fig.). The percentage of the population favoring capital punishment has remained largely unchanged, with only a slight increase in public support since the late 1970s. In 1976, the majority of the American public, 64%, favored the death penalty for a person convicted of murder. However, in 1995, the support for capital punishment dropped to 59%, indicating a slight decline in public sentiment. This trend was reversed in 1998, when 63% of the population supported capital punishment for murder.

The support for capital punishment has varied over the years, with the highest support in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the lowest in the 1990s. The trend suggests that public opinion about capital punishment is not static, but rather fluctuates based on various factors such as public sentiment, legal changes, and media coverage.

The data from the Gallup surveys indicate that the public's support for capital punishment is influenced by factors such as the perception of justice, the severity of the crime, and the effectiveness of alternative forms of punishment. The consistency of the support for capital punishment over the years suggests that the public holds a strong belief in the use of capital punishment as a deterrent against murder.

The support for capital punishment has also been influenced by legal changes, such as the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976, and the subsequent availability of legal appeals and executive clemency. The availability of these legal options has led to a reduction in the number of executions, which in turn has decreased the support for capital punishment.

In conclusion, the public's support for capital punishment is influenced by various factors, and the support fluctuates over time. The data from the Gallup surveys provide a clear picture of the public's sentiment about capital punishment, and the trends suggest that the public's support for capital punishment is not static, but rather varies based on the available legal options and the public's perception of justice.
B. Reconsidering Public Opinion Polls

Not all academic writings oppose capital punishment; in philosophy and economics, for example, occasional attempts are made to show its morality or utility (see, e.g., Ehrlich 1973; Beers 1979). However, although exceptions exist (Friedrichs 1989), the vast majority of scholarship published by other social scientists—especially by criminologists and sociologists—attacks capital punishment (for summaries, see Smith 1995, Flood 1998). Being against the death penalty is part of these scholars' professional or disciplinary ideology, and thus they are strongly motivated to produce knowledge that discredit its use. Toward this end, they have conducted studies showing that capital punishment does not deter and may actually increase crime (the "neutralization effect"). They have administered a racially biased biased way, is prone to mistake and to being wrongfully applied to innocent people; is imposed by juries who do not understand the sentencing instructions on aggravating and mitigating circumstances given by judges during the penalty phase of murder trials, is used against offenders who rarely recidivate, and is more costly to carry out than a sentence of life imprisonment.

Despite mounting evidence on the problematic nature of capital punishment, these scholars are confronted with a stubborn reality: the American public apparently wants to execute convicted murderers. Regardless of what knowledge they might produce, public opinion polls seem unaffected. These polls thus present a formidable barrier to abolishing capital punishment or decreasing its spread. With seven in ten adults supporting the execution of convicted murderers, how would the political will ever be summoned to restrict use of the death penalty?

Not surprisingly, then, these scholars have acquired public opinion research in hopes of misleading is. If existing polling data or methods can be shown to misconstrue the "true" view of the public on capital punishment, then the seemingly sturdy foundation on which the American death penalty rests will be commensurately weakened.

Their attack on public opinion polls has been waged in two general ways (see Costanzo 1997). First, in examining why people endorse the death penalty, these scholars have often linked support to a range of "unattractive" factors: racial prejudice, religious fundamentalism or biblical literalism, conservatism, antibortion views, unwarranted fearfulness about crime, ignorance about the death penalty, and so on (see, e.g., Young 1991; Grassmick, Bursik, and Blackwell 1993; Barks and Cohen 1994; Cook 1998; more generally, see Roberts and Small 1997). This strategy is subtle and, in this postmodern age, requires an exercise in deconstruction. To be sure, research of this genre is useful in uncovering empirical sources of death penalty attitudes, although the explained variation in these studies is generally low to modest (Grassmick, Bursik, and Blackwell 1993, p. 74). But note that support for capital punishment is virtually never traced to positive factors—or factors praised in a positive way—such as a deep respect for the life of the victim, a genuine concern for the pain felt by the victim's family, and a reluctant but principled belief that an egregious breach of the moral order requires the taking of the offender's life. Instead, the underlying intellectual and ideological project is to delegitimize the public's embrace of capital punishment. Indeed, although the message is implicit, the research suggests that those who are secular humanists, progressive politicians, advocates of racial justice, knowledgeable about crime, and supporters of a woman's "right to choose" would not favor the death penalty. Of course, this account is a rough self-portrait of many of these scholars: if the public were like us, they would not support executing offenders.

Second and more noteworthy, these anti—death penalty social scientists have argued that the national polls, which measure capital punishment attitudes with a single question such as "Are you in favor of the death penalty for a person convicted of murder?" make the mistake of attempting to assess a complex set of opinions in a simplistic fashion. These polls not only do not capture the nuances of people's views but, more disturbingly, are biased in the direction of artificially inflating support for capital punishment (Elliworth and Ragsdale 1983; Harris 1986). When surveys are more methodologically sophisticated, the public's seemingly firm support for execution murderers weakens.

One research strategy has been to differentiate between polls that ask about support for capital punishment in the abstract as opposed to a situation in which the decision to impose this lethal sanction is more personally salient or "real." In a 1984 survey of Texas residents, for
example, Williams, Longmuir, and Clark (1989) found that respondents were asked if they would recommend imposing the death penalty as a一种 in a murder case. The study was conducted in 1987 and examined the opinions of the public on capital punishment. The results showed that 65% of respondents were in favor of the death penalty for murder.

The study also found that the percentage of respondents who supported the death penalty decreased with the age of the victim. For example, 90% of respondents aged 18-24 years supported the death penalty, while only 60% of respondents aged 65 or older supported it.

Furthermore, the study found that the percentage of respondents who supported the death penalty was higher among respondents with a higher education level. For example, 75% of respondents with a college degree supported the death penalty, while only 50% of respondents with a high school diploma or less supported it.

On the other hand, the study found that the percentage of respondents who supported the death penalty was lower among respondents who were not married or who had children. For example, 80% of respondents who were not married supported the death penalty, while only 60% of respondents who were married supported it.

The study also found that the percentage of respondents who supported the death penalty was higher among respondents who lived in rural areas, while it was lower among respondents who lived in urban areas. For example, 80% of respondents who lived in rural areas supported the death penalty, while only 60% of respondents who lived in urban areas supported it.

Overall, the study found that the percentage of respondents who supported the death penalty decreased with the age of the victim, the education level of the respondent, and the marital status of the respondent. The study also found that the percentage of respondents who supported the death penalty was higher among respondents who lived in rural areas.
in prison for life." Note, however, that fully 74 percent chose as the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

C. Life in prison without parole (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life in prison without parole as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

D. Death penalty (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing death as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

E. Capital punishment (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing capital punishment as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

F. Life without parole (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life without parole as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

G. Life in prison (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life in prison as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

H. Death penalty (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing death as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

I. Life in prison without parole (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life in prison without parole as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

J. Capital punishment (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing capital punishment as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

K. Life in prison (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life in prison as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

L. Death penalty (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing death as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

M. Life without parole (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life without parole as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

N. Life in prison (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life in prison as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

O. Capital punishment (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing capital punishment as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

P. Life without parole (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life without parole as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

Q. Life in prison (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life in prison as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

R. Death penalty (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing death as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

S. Life without parole (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life without parole as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

T. Life in prison (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life in prison as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

U. Capital punishment (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing capital punishment as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

V. Life without parole (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life without parole as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

W. Life in prison (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life in prison as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

X. Capital punishment (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing capital punishment as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

Y. Life without parole (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life without parole as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."

Z. Life in prison (p. 720) and sentencing that "The policy's most common reason for choosing life in prison as the best reason to support the death penalty is the belief that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures the best reason to support the death penalty that it "ensures that the person is never released from prison."
Why are citizens so supportive of the death penalty as an option? A study conducted in 1994 in New York and Nebraska found that many people favored the death penalty because it is a deterrent to crime and provides the most conclusive evidence that a person is guilty. However, a majority of those surveyed opposed the death penalty, citing it as too expensive and unreliable.

In the same study, 82% of those surveyed felt that the death penalty was too expensive and unreliable. The death penalty was only favored by 18% of respondents.

The study also found that people were more likely to support the death penalty if they had a close relative who was killed. This suggests that empathy plays a role in support for the death penalty.

The study further found that people who believed in the justice system were more likely to support the death penalty. This suggests that trust in the justice system is also a factor in support for the death penalty.

In conclusion, while the death penalty may be viewed as a deterrent to crime, it is also seen as too expensive and unreliable by many people. Empathy and trust in the justice system are also factors in support for the death penalty.
Public Opinion About Punishment and Corrections

22

Public Opinion About Punishment and Corrections

limited to the issues it probed, and the capital punishment question covered only the death penalty for youth. Further, much has changed in the time since the 1990s, and older public opinion surveys may not fully reflect current public opinion. For example, a 1996 study by the American Bar Association found that 76% of respondents supported capital punishment for youth, compared to 72% in a 1990 survey. More recent surveys have shown a decline in support for the death penalty in general, although the data are sparse and not always directly comparable.

In general, public opinion on capital punishment is complex and influenced by a variety of factors, including the severity of the crime, the age of the perpetrator, and the views of the public on crime and justice. Some surveys have suggested that support for capital punishment is higher among certain demographic groups, such as those with lower levels of education and income, and those who believe in strict law enforcement. However, there is also evidence that public opinion on capital punishment can be influenced by media coverage, political rhetoric, and other factors that may shape public perceptions of the issue.

Despite the complexity of the issue, it is clear that public opinion on capital punishment continues to evolve and that ongoing research and surveys are needed to better understand the attitudes and beliefs of the public on this important issue.

[Further discussion on public opinion and capital punishment, with additional data and references cited]

[End of text]
sponsers for adult offenders, fewer respondents "strongly favored" the capital punishment of juveniles while more respondents "strongly opposed" it. Over three-fifths of the sample also stated that capital punishment with youngsters should be used either not at all or in only a few cases. Most noteworthy, 64 percent preferred sentencing juvenile murderers to a life sentence with no possibility of parole. This figure climbed to 80 percent when the LWOP option included work and restitution to the families of the victims. Even among those who initially "strongly favored" the death penalty, a majority preferred the LWOP + R alternative to capital punishment.

E. Religion and the Death Penalty

One other recent development in the study of death penalty attitudes warrants consideration: the growing interest in the impact of religion on support for capital punishment. This research focus likely reflects two trends. First, in the 1990s, Christian conservatives came to play an increasingly prominent role on a range of cultural and, in turn, policy issues (Hunter 1991; Layman 1997). Second, it appears that scholars interested in crime-policy issues belatedly recognized the centrality of religion in the lives of Americans. Social scientists in general had tended to embrace "secularization theory," which proposed that modernization and economic development would lead inevitably to a decline in the cultural importance of religious beliefs. Yet, even as the nation ostensibly moves toward a postmodern and postindustrial phase, citizens continue to report extensive involvement in religion (see Had- den 1987; Wald 1992). Polls show, for example, that 96 percent of Americans say that they believe in God; 67 percent report that they see members of a church or synagogue; and 61 percent indicate that religion is a "very important" part of their lives (Newport and Saad 1997; Shorto 1997).

Much of the recent research has explored the influence of fundamentalist religious membership or beliefs, arguing that they increase support for capital punishment. Specifying this influence, however, has proven a daunting task. There is evidence that lends credence to the thesis that fundamentalism, especially a literal interpretation of the Bible, fosters endorsement of the death penalty (see, e.g., Young 1992; Grassmick, Bursik, and Blackwell 1993; Grassmick et al. 1993; Young and Thompson 1995; Borg 1997; Brait 1998). Even so, Brait (1998) finds that compared to nonfundamentalists, white fundamentalists are the most supportive of capital punishment but that African-American fundamentalists are less supportive. Some research, moreover, suggests that religious fundamentalism leads to supportive death penalty attitudes in the Bible Belt and southern states but not in other geographical areas, although the research findings on this point are inconsistent (Young 1992; Young and Thompson 1995; Borg 1997; Sands and McCarthy 1997; Applegate et al., forthcoming). More generally, the research suggests that religious fundamentalism and biblical literalism are related to a range of punitive attitudes, such as support for stiff criminal legislation, for harsh sentencing, for treating juveniles more stringently, and for retribution as a Penal philosophy (Grasmic et al. 1992; Grass- mick, Cochran, et al. 1993; Grassmick and McGill 1994; Young and Thompson 1995; see also Leiber, Woodrick, and Routledge 1995; Leiber and Woodrick 1997).

Applegate et al. (forthcoming), however, argue that much of the existing research is informed by a stereotypical view of religion: the tendency to see religion as a source of control and of politically conservative sentiments (for an exception, see Brit 1998). In embracing this limited conception of religion, researchers have not explored how religious messages of compassion and redemption might foster progressive criminal justice-related attitudes. Toward this end, in a 1996 statewide survey of Ohio residents, Applegate et al. (forthcoming) examined whether a belief in religious forgiveness was associated with a range of attitudinal outcomes, including the death penalty. Notably, controlling for other religious variables, forgiveness was negatively and strongly related to support for capital punishment, harbinger courts, and general punitiveness and positively related to support for rehabilitation. This study reveals the importance of attitudinal research of being informed by a richer understanding of religion and its potential role in shaping the worldviews people hold, including their judgments about the treatment of lawbreakers.

II. Public Support for Punishment

Because capital punishment is the ultimate penalty—a special issue that is the focus of interminable and heated debate—generalizing from studies of death penalty attitudes to what the public thinks about punish- ment in general is risky. Take, for example, the finding that the American public is apparently willing to support life in prison without parole over the death penalty. Does this result show that citizens are more judicious, and not nearly as punitive, as they are commonly por- trayed? Or does it reveal only that people, while open to interchanging
penalties, will only do so if these penalties are both quite harsh? Thus, although capital punishment has often occupied a central place in the study of public attitudes, a complete assessment of public opinion about corrections needs to move beyond this issue.

In this section, we report one body of research that is relevant to an assessment of the public's views on what should be done with lawbreakers: studies that investigate support for punishment. The research reveals that the public harbors punitive attitudes toward offenders, favors the use of prison sentences as a response to crime, and is generally supportive of get-tough initiatives such as three-strikes-and-you're-out laws. This literature is important in showing that there is a large reservoir of punitive sentiments that are likely real and not easily dismissed as the mere artifact of the methodological approaches used to study public opinion. At the same time, citizens show a degree of flexibility in their willingness to support, or at least tolerate, sanctions other than imprisonment. Their support of three-strikes laws, moreover, diminishes substantially when specific, rather than global, opinions are measured. Finally, as we show in later sections, studies of punitiveness illuminate only one dimension of the public's thinking and, taken by themselves, can result in a distorted portrait of citizens' correctional ideology.

A. General Punitive Attitudes

To measure whether the public is punitive, one common strategy has been to present survey respondents with a statement—for example, "The best way to stop crime is to get tough with offenders"—and then to ask whether they endorse this view. The most commonly cited example of this type of research is the General Social Survey, which since 1972 has asked this question: "In general, do you think the courts in this area deal too softly or not harshly enough with criminals?" The 1996 survey found that 78 percent answered "not harshly enough," while only 5 percent stated that the courts were too harsh (the remaining 18 percent answered "about right"). (Maguire and Pastore 1998, pp. 114–45; Smith 1998). Figure 2 presents the trend data for the last quarter of the century. In 1972, 65.5 percent of the sample believed that the courts were "not harsh enough." Two years later, this percentage had jumped 13 points to 78.5 percent. In subsequent years, the percentage endorsing harsher courts fluctuated but remained above this figure; it reached a high of 87 percent in 1982 and was 85.1 percent in 1994. Although this figure dropped by 7 percentage points in 1996, a stubborn reality remains: nearly four in five Americans believe that the courts in their communities are not sufficiently punitive.

Recent national polls suggest that the General Social Survey results are not idiosyncratic (all polls obtained from http://dialog.uci.edu). A 1996 CBS News Poll, for example, asked whether respondents believed that "to solve the country's crime problem," it was more important for the "next administration" to "impose sterner sentences on criminals or increase the amount of police on the streets." Notably, 54 percent selected "sterner sentences," more than twice the proportion of the sample choosing "increase police" (26 percent). In a 1998 survey conducted by Time/CNN/Veriskovitch Partners, nearly three-fourths of the respondents stated that the U.S. Congress should give a "high priority" to "tougher crime enforcement legislation." Similarly, a 1997 survey by U.S. News & World Report and Boxell Worldwide reported that 72 percent of adults "strongly favored" and another 17 percent "favored" the policy of "tougher sentences for criminals." And a 1998 NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll found that 78 percent of the respondents "strongly agreed" that "we should toughen and strengthen penalties for convicted criminals."

Although the public harbors punitive sentiments, the question remains as to what specific correctional policies they embrace. Because studies have not been designed to explore the full complexity of public
opinion on the punishment of crime—indeed, particularly, how commonly
contrary beliefs are interrelated (Jones 1991). Belief in the deterrence
or incapacitation theories, for example, is largely indicative of the
victim's views, and so on. The researchers did not specifically examine
the effect of variables, but the inclusion of a group of unique vignettes
(i.e., every victim's case was different) ensured that the victim's
cases were distinct from each other, as were the unique characteristics
of the offender. The results, however, were significant and consistent;
the offenders were perceived as more likely to be deterred by
police intervention in those cases in which the victim was perceived
as a victim of an elderly offender.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Braithwaite and Mazer (1985) found that the perceived seriousness
of a crime is affected by the victim's crime victimization. The
results of this study are also consistent with previous research on
the effects of crime victimization on public opinion. For example,
Public Opinion about Punishments and Corrections

31

Frauds: small, residential burglary, and fraud.

Franz T. Gallant, Bonnie S. Fisher, and Bruce K. Applegate

The results of a survey conducted for the National

Police, robbery, assault, theft, forgery, forgery, drug offenses, drunk driving.

The survey asked respondents about their opinions on various aspects of punishment for crime.

The survey found that the public generally supported harsher punishments for serious crimes, but had mixed opinions on the appropriate length of sentences for less serious crimes.

The survey also found that the public was concerned about the fairness of the criminal justice system and the way in which sentences were determined.

Overall, the survey suggested that the public's attitudes towards punishment were complex and varied, and that there was no one-size-fits-all solution to the issue of how to punish criminal offenders.
critics were generally willing to argue criminal punishment was justified by the need to protect the innocent from the threat of future crimes.

White-collar crimes are typically associated with high financial losses and significant economic impact. The legal system has historically struggled to address these crimes due to their complex nature and the need for specialized knowledge and resources.

The distinction between white-collar and street-level crime is not always clear-cut. However, the consequences of white-collar crime can be far more severe due to the nature of the offenses, often resulting in large financial losses and significant reputational damage.

C. Proportion of Support for Prison Sentences

The proportion of support for prison sentences for white-collar crimes is generally lower compared to street-level crimes. This is likely due to the perception that white-collar crimes are not as harmful to society as street-level crimes.

However, it is important to note that the severity of a crime should not be determined solely by societal norms or perceptions. The actual harm caused by the crime, the offender's level of responsibility, and the need for deterrence are all important factors to consider in sentencing decisions.

In conclusion, the high-stakes nature of white-collar crimes, combined with the difficulty in proving intent and motive, can lead to more lenient sentences compared to street-level crimes. Nevertheless, the consequences of white-collar crimes are significant, and society must find ways to address these offenses effectively while ensuring justice is served.

References


most important predictor of which offenders people believe should receive more or less prison time—there's not much public support for the absolute punishments, so the phrase is no longer applicable. An early version of this study, by Donald J. Cressey, explored the relationship between perceived punishment and the public's willingness to support capital punishment. In the National Capital Punishment Survey, for example, offense seriousness scores were found to be the only predictor of support for the death penalty. The more serious the offense, the greater the support for the death penalty. In the absence of punishment, people would be more likely to support the death penalty. The problem is that many people do not believe that the death penalty is a good punishment for serious offenses. Finally, research on the effectiveness of capital punishment shows that it is not a deterrent to crime. A study by James Q. Wilson and John C. Hagan, for example, found that the death penalty has a negligible effect on crime rates. Indeed, a study by the National Academy of Sciences concluded that the death penalty has no deterrent effect on crime.
time makes imprisoning nonviolent offenders less attractive. A bifurcated public opinion thus emerges: more consistent on prison sentences for violence and more open to alternatives for property, drug, and similar offenses (see the research cited in Sec. III). Ironically, critics of pris-
on— including criminologists and other social science scholars— may help to cement this way of thinking. To the extent that they have per-
suaded the public that prisons are so inhumane that they are incapable of inducing offenders to change, they may unwittingly provide a con-
vincing rationale for not releasing "dangerous" offenders into society.

Another possibility is that because a significant portion of the public has doubts about the effectiveness of prisons, support for their use is widespread but not as deep as is commonly portrayed. Except for the most egregious offenses and intractable lawbreakers, citizens may pre-
suasively favor prison terms but be open to alternatives, shorter sen-
tences, and/or parole release if given a convincing reason to do so. In this
scenario, the bulk of the public are rational decision makers who are not wed to a strict "lock 'em up" mentality. The challenge, of course, is to provide a justification for limiting the use of imprisonment that is coherent enough to maintain its persuasiveness across diverse
sentencing situations.

Some backing for the view that support for prisons is somewhat "measly" can be drawn from Turner et al.'s (1995) survey of 287 Cin-
cinnati-area residents in 1995. They started with the assumption that
punishment attitudes are not rigidly fixed at a single point but rather are best conceptualized as ranging from what sentence a respondent might prefer to what the person might be willing to "tolerate" or ac-
cept (Durham 1993; Bowers, Vandiver, and Dugan 1994). Using the
factorial approach, vignettes were developed for two forms of robbery (with and without injury) and for two forms of burglary ($250 and
$1,000 of stolen merchandise). In Ohio, these crimes carry a presumpt-
ive prison sentence of three to twenty-five years, depending on the
characteristics of the offense and offender; one-third of Ohio's prison
population is composed of people convicted of some form of robbery
or burglary. The respondents were given a list of sanctions that in-
cluded traditional probation, three intermediate sanctions, shock in-
carceration, and imprisonment. Each of these sanctions was described in
detail. To measure "tolerance," the sample was first instructed to se-
lect the sanction that they would "most like" to give the offender; then
were asked what other sentences they would find "acceptable."

Public Opinion about Punishment and Corrections

The analysis suggested four main conclusions. First, only a limited percentage of the sample selected "regular probation" as a preferred
or acceptable sentence. Second, the preference for imposing a prison
sentence or shock incarceration was fairly modest, ranging across the
four offenses from 51.7 percent to 57.9 percent. In part, the lack of
strong support for locking up offenders may be because the commu-
nity-based sentencing options included intermediate penalties and
were explained (e.g., "Strict Probation: John would live in the commu-
nity, but must meet with a probation officer five times a week for two
years"); Third, when "acceptable" sentences were analyzed, only 26.8–
35.2 percent of the sample still insisted on the offender spending time
incarcerated. Across all vignettes, about two-thirds of the respondents
thus were willing to tolerate a community-based sanction. Fourth,
even so, tolerance for sanctions was bidirectional, with many of those
initially favoring community sanctions also finding imprisonment ac-
teptable.

Taken together, these results reveal that for traditional "street crim-
inals"—robbers and burglars—the public tends to prefer, and certainty
is not strongly opposed to, assigning a prison term. Citizens also ap-
ppear wary of "regular probation," a sanction that involves minimal
contact with the offender. In contrast, they are willing to consider al-
tervatives to incarceration if it appears that the community sanctions
will involve some meaningful intervention (e.g., strict monitoring). We
return to this point in Section III.

Finally, research on attitudes toward parole further illuminates the
public's willingness to attenuate support for prison when furnished with
a rationale for doing so. In a 1995 national survey, respondents were
asked what measures they would favor or oppose as a means of
reducing prison overcrowding. Only 8 percent favored shortening sen-
tences and only 21 percent favored "giving the parole board more au-
thority to release offenders early. In contrast, 64 percent endorsed the
policy of "allowing prisoners to earn early release through good behav-
ior and participation in educational and work programs" (Flanagan
1996a, pp. 88, 192). These results are similar to the findings of a survey
conducted nearly a decade earlier in Ohio (Skowron, Scott, and Cullen
1988). This research suggests that while opposed to shortening prison
terms in a sweeping and potentially arbitrary way, citizens will do so
for offenders who have taken steps to improve themselves and whose
prospects for community reintegration thus appear promising.
"Sentencing," argues Tonry (1990, p. 3), "matters in the 1990s more than ever before." Although battles over sentencing reform ex-
tended to the 1970s (Cullen and Gilbert 1982; Tonry 1992), the move-
ment to constrain judicial discretion and to ensure that offenders would be "locked up" reached a feverish pitch in the nineties. From the mid-1980s into the early 1990s, the U.S. Congress and most states enacted a host of statutes mandating prison terms for a variety of of-
feres. By the end of the decade, virtually every state had a policy of mandatory minimum imprisonment (Tonry 1998). Truth-in-sentenc-
ing laws, which stipulate that offenders serve a high proportion (e.g., 85 percent) of the sentences imposed at trial, became commonplace (Ditton and Wilson 1999). Most salient, however, was the renewed en-
thusiasm for habitual-offender laws, which were reworked under the label "three strikes and you're out." Between 1991 and 1995, twenty-
four states and the federal government passed parole statutes that, with some variation, required life sentences—usually without the possibility of parole—for offenders convicted of three violent or serious crimes (Turner et al. 1996; Clark, Austin, and Henry 1997; see also Stinchor and Sechrest 1996).

Does the public support three-strikes laws? At least as a general ap-
proach to punishing habitual violent offenders, the answer appears to be, yes. In a 1993 referendum, voters in Washington approved the first three-strikes statute by a 3:1 margin (Clark, Austin, and Henry 1997, p. 14); subsequently, the electorate in California ratified a three-strikes law passed by the state's legislature in 1994 by a margin of 72 percent for to 28 percent against (Stinchor and Sechrest 1996, p. v). Opinion polls suggest that these results were not idiosyncratic. A 1994 TIME/ CNN Poll found that 91 percent of adults favored mandatory life im-
mont residents in the same year reached similar results: 61 percent fa-
vored mandatory life-sentences for three-time violent criminals, "even if this means the prisoners will eventually be filled with lots of very old men who pose little danger to anyone" (Dubin Research Associates 1994, p. 43).

It is questionable, however, whether citizens truly wish the three-
strikes law applied to every offender who would qualify for a life sen-
tence without parole (Finkel et al. 1996; Roberts 1996). Thus, in fac-
torial survey studies in which concrete cases are rated, the impact of prior record on sentencing preferences varies across studies—although it tends to explain some variation—and its effects are outweighed by the seriousness of the current offense (see, e.g., Apelgge et al. 1996a, 1996b; Rossi, Berk, and Campbell 1997; Jacobs and Cullen 1998). The research by Apelgge et al. (1996b) illumnates the gap between "global" and "specific" attitudes toward three-strikes laws. In a 1995 study of Cincinnati-area residents, the respondents showed extensive support for the general or global concept of "three strikes and you're out." Over 88 percent of the sample stated that they either "strongly" (22.1 percent) or "somewhat" (16.3 percent) supported passing a three-strikes law in Ohio that would give a life prison sentence to "anyone with two serious felony convictions on their record who is convicted of a third serious crime" (1996, p. 527). In a second stage of the survey, however, Apelgge and his associates had the respon-
dents rate a specific vignette that included a mixture of crimes that would make the offender eligible for a mandatory life sentence. The offenses included in the factorial vignette were derived from a three-
strikes statute then pending in the Ohio legislature. The respondents were asked to select a sentence from a list that ranged from "no pun-
ishment" and "probation" to "life in prison." and without a chance of parole. Across the vignettes, only 16.9 percent assigned a life sen-
tence. In various multivariate models, moreover, past record gener-
ally had little, if any, effect on the sentencing decisions. Finally, in an-
other part of the survey, the respondents also were asked if there were any circumstances under which they would make exceptions to impos-
ing a "three-strikes life sentence." These showed at least a mea-
sure of flexibility in punishment attitudes. Thus a majority of the sam-
ple favored making exceptions when a third offense was relatively minor, when the offender was mentally ill, when the inmate is rehabili-
tated while in prison, and when incarcerated the offender would mean that a more dangerous individual would have to be released.

These results suggest that members of the public can hold seemingly incompatible views favoring the general principle of three strikes and you're out but not believing that this principle should be applied in-
vitably to specific offenders under specific circumstances. Future re-
search should be designed to probate respondents to explain why they voice discrepant views. Respondents may not be conscious of the gap.
between their global and specific attitudes, or perhaps their attitudes are a methodological artifact since distinct rating tasks are involved. The other possibility, however, is that different norms weigh more heavily in organizing public opinion in these two domains. Thus, in supporting three-strikes legislation, considerations of societal protection may be more salient: it seems like a good idea to take repeat, serious offenders off the street. In judging a vignette, though, the question of what is fair for the particular individual being sentenced becomes more prominent (see Finkel et al. 1996). There may be consensus that dangerous people should be incarcerated for life but disagreement over who specifically qualifies for this designation and to what degree.

Although not addressing this question directly, Tyler and Boeckmann’s (1997) survey of 166 residents of the East Bay area of San Francisco complicates our understanding of why the public might support three-strikes laws. Their analysis showed that support for California’s three-strike initiative was not chiefly “instrumental”; respondents concerned about crime and lacking faith in the courts were not more likely to endorse the initiative. Since the respondents were not asked directly why they supported the three-strikes proposal, this analysis cannot rule out that even those not gripped with concern about crime might have made the “rational” assessment that it was prudent to lock up repeat serious or violent offenders. Still, Tyler and Boeckmann’s analysis also revealed that support for the three-strikes law was related to social values and concerns about the strength of social bonds in families. “Those citizens who feel that the moral and social consensus that holds society together is declining,” they note, “are more supportive of punitive public policies” (1997, p. 256). In short, three-strikes laws may have struck a chord with the public not because they were a compelling crime control strategy but because they offered a symbolic means of affirming a shaky social order.

III. Public Support for Alternatives to Incarceration

In the 1990s, two issues—one occurring primarily at the front end of the decade, one primarily at the back end of the decade—dominated policy discussions about the nature of community-based corrections: intermediate sanctions and restorative justice. Although the effectiveness of these approaches in reducing offender recidivism is open to question, both enjoyed the support of liberals and conservatives (Cullen, Wright, and Applegate 1996; Levrant et al. 1999). “Intermediate sanctions”—penalties that exist “between prison and probation” (Morris and Tonry 1990)—were favored by liberals as an alternative to prisons and by conservatives as a cost-effective means of punishing offenders. Restorative justice—the attempt to punish and reintegrate offenders into the community—was endorsed by liberals as another strategy for limiting the harm inflicted on offenders and by conservatives as a way of assisting victims.

Although not without important qualifications, public support for these initiatives appears to be fairly widespread. Thus research shows that citizens endorse the use of virtually all types of intermediate sanctions (e.g., community service, boot camps, intensive supervision programs). The public’s backing of intermediate sanctions also appears to increase when its members are presented with information on the costs of prisons and on the nature of these community-based penalties. However, people support the use of intermediate sanctions primarily for nonviolent offenders as opposed to violent offenders and as an alternative not only for imprisonment but also for regular probation (i.e., they are not against net widening). Similarly, there is beginning to be evidence that restorative justice is favored by the public, in part, we suspect, because it promises to accrue benefits for—that is, to restore—victims, offenders, and the community. Once again, the public sees this type of sanction as mainly appropriate for nonviolent offenders.

A. Intermediate Sanctions

It is often stated that because traditional community correctional interventions—especially probation—are not viewed by Americans as punitive, a sentence other than imprisonment is seen as a sign of leniency (Flanagan 1960). There is, in fact, evidence that the public views probation as a lenient punishment (Harlow, Darby, and Robinson 1995; see also Turner et al. 1997). In a 1996 national poll, 53.3 percent of the sample “agreed” that “community corrections programs are evidence of leniency in the criminal justice system.” Only three in ten respondents disagreed, while the remainder (13.8 percent) were undecided (Flanagan 1996a, p. 6). In contrast, intermediate sanctions were intended to be sufficiently punitive to offer a “sensible” alternative to locking up offenders (Anderson 1998). Importantly, research indicates that in assessing the severity of punishments, the public views these sanctions “as intermediate in severity between the perceived harshness of prison and the perceived leniency of probation” (Harlow, Darby, and Robinson 1995, p. 86). Further, it would seem
possible to structure intermediate sanctions in ways to have them work more effectively as a preventive measure against future offending. It is necessary to have accurate assessment of an individual's risk of re-offending, and it must be possible to structure sanctions to take that risk into account. Intermediate sanctions can be structured to be more effective than community service or restitution, which can be under-funded and under-managed. They can also be more effective in containing subsequent offending. An intermediate sanction should be imposed when the public danger is of a low or medium (or, in some cases, high) degree. The sanction should be determined by considering the following factors:

- The nature and extent of the crime, including its potential to cause harm or damage.
- The individual's criminal history and background, including any prior convictions or offenses.
- The individual's character and motivation, including whether they have a history of violence or aggression.
- The safety of the community and the public, including whether the individual has a history of offending in a particular area.

Intermediate sanctions can be structured to be more effective than community service or restitution, which can be under-funded and under-managed. They can also be more effective in containing subsequent offending. An intermediate sanction should be imposed when the public danger is of a low or medium (or, in some cases, high) degree. The sanction should be determined by considering the following factors:

- The nature and extent of the crime, including its potential to cause harm or damage.
- The individual's criminal history and background, including any prior convictions or offenses.
- The individual's character and motivation, including whether they have a history of violence or aggression.
- The safety of the community and the public, including whether the individual has a history of offending in a particular area.
null

they completed a second questionnaire within their ideological and emotional centers at the end of the five treatment sessions. The respondents included 27 individuals who had no previous experience with the treatment sessions. The respondents were randomly assigned to either the control or the treatment condition. The control group received no treatment and served as a baseline for comparison. The treatment group received the five treatment sessions, each lasting two hours. The control group was not exposed to any treatment and served as a baseline for comparison. The treatment group received the five treatment sessions, each lasting two hours.

null

The Public Agenda Foundation's findings should be interpreted carefully in light of the limitations of this research design. The surveys used in this study were not designed to measure social and emotional change, but they did provide information about emotional change. The limitation of the study was that it did not include a control group, so it was not possible to determine whether the observed changes were caused by the treatment or by some other factor.

null

The researchers used a variety of measures to assess the emotional and social impact of the treatment sessions. These measures included questionnaires, interviews, and direct observation. The questionnaires were used to assess the respondents' emotional state before and after each treatment session. The interviews were used to gather more detailed information about the respondents' experiences. The direct observation was used to assess the respondents' behavior during the treatment sessions.

null

The Public Agenda Foundation's findings should be interpreted carefully in light of the limitations of this research design. The surveys used in this study were not designed to measure social and emotional change, but they did provide information about emotional change. The limitation of the study was that it did not include a control group, so it was not possible to determine whether the observed changes were caused by the treatment or by some other factor.
The rehabilitation idea, that reforming offenders can make them useful members of society and reduce their criminal tendencies, has been a cornerstone of criminal justice reform. This approach is based on the belief that by addressing the root causes of criminal behavior, such as poverty, lack of education, and mental illness, offenders can be transformed into productive members of society.

However, the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs has been debated. While some studies suggest that rehabilitation can be effective in reducing recidivism rates, others have found that these programs may not have a significant impact on criminal behavior.

In recent years, there has been a shift towards more punitive approaches to criminal justice, with a focus on increasing incarceration rates. This has led to concerns about the cost and societal impact of these policies, as well as questions about their effectiveness in reducing crime.

The debate over rehabilitation versus punishment is ongoing, with proponents of each approach highlighting different aspects of the issue. Ultimately, the best approach to criminal justice reform will likely involve a combination of initiatives that address both the underlying causes of criminal behavior and the need to uphold public safety.
A. Public Policy: Guilt-Sharing Restrained

Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Child &amp; Adolescent</th>
<th>Fourth and Eighth Grade</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perhaps the most studied topic in the public's assessment of the criminal justice system is the public's willingness to impose life or death sentences on offenders. This research suggests that the public has become more willing to condone capital punishment as a policy option, and the data show that public support for capital punishment has increased over time. For example, in 1968, only 66% of the public favored the death penalty, while by 1984, this number had increased to 98%. The data also show that public support for the death penalty is higher among adults than among children and adolescents. In 1968, 72% of adults favored capital punishment, compared to 60% of children and adolescents. However, the data indicate that support for the death penalty has increased among children and adolescents over time, with 80% of children and adolescents favoring capital punishment in 1984.
1 asked citizens virtually the same question and thus offer a basis for comparison that is potentially less influenced by methodological issues: the two Harris polls, the two Cincinnati polls, and the Ohio poll. Between 1968 and 1982, support for rehabilitation decreased in the Harris polls 29 percentage points to 44 percent. In the decade from 1986 to 1995, the decline in support for rehabilitation in the Cincinnati samples was 22.1 percentage points, with less than a third of Cincinnatians favoring the offender treatment option in the mid-nineties. The proportion of citizens endorsing rehabilitation was higher in a 1996 statewide Ohio sample—four in ten respondents chose treatment as their main goal of prison—but this level of support still was substantially lower (31.9 percentage points) than the Harris poll conducted in 1968.

The data in table 1 suggest two related considerations. First, the 1995 national poll asked whether the government should place a greater emphasis on rehabilitating or "punishing and putting away" violent criminals. Note that only about a quarter of the sample endorsed treatment, although another 12.3 percent answered "both" (Maguire and Pastore 1997, p. 154; see also Gerber and Engelhardt-Green 1996, p. 72). In contrast, the combined goal of punishment and incapacitation was favored by nearly six in ten respondents. With dangerous offenders, it appears that public protection trumps efforts to reform offenders.

Research by Sundt et al. (1998) reinforces this conclusion that citizens may be less supportive of treatment for violent as opposed to nonviolent offenders as the main goal of corrections (see also Cullen et al. 1990). In a 1995 survey of Cincinnati residents, Sundt et al. found that 66.1 percent of the respondents believed the rehabilitation would be "very helpful" or "helpful" for nonviolent offenders. The comparable figure for violent offenders was only 11.8 percent, although another 27.4 percent felt that treatment might be "slightly helpful" (1998, p. 337). A national study in the same year found that only 14.6 percent of the respondents believed that "most" violent criminals "can be rehabilitated given early intervention with the right program"; however, 44.8 percent did answer "some." The remainder of the sample answered either "only a few" (28.2 percent) or "none" (9.1 percent). Other research suggests that, in general, the public believes that only a minority of prison inmates will be "successfully rehabilitated" (see, e.g., Dodge Research Associates 1993b, p. 40).

Second, it appears that once offenders are in prison, support for re-
Applegate, Colvin, and Fisher (1997, p. 246) showed this to be the case. When asked to rate the importance of various goals of imprisonment, over 90 percent of their Ohio sample rated protection and punishment as "important" or "very important." Although support was not as strong, more than eight in ten Ohioans defined rehabilitation as "very important" (85.1 percent) or as "important" (17.7 percent).

Second, surveys have asked people about their support for various correctional programs. Almost uniformly, the U.S. public has strongly endorsed such interventions. In a 1979 U.S. News and World Report and Rosell Worldwide Poll, more than three-fourths of the national sample favored "prisoner rehabilitation programs" (see http://dialog.carl.org). In a nationwide 1996 Survey of American Political Culture reported that 85 percent of those surveyed stated that "more treatment and education" was either "very important" or "important" to "solving" the crime problem (from http://dialog.carl.org). Simi-
larly, a 1995 Oklahoma survey found that two-thirds of the sample fa-
vored "providing psychiatric treatment to every mentally ill inmate" and making "sure every inmate has a chance to get a high school diploma" — even if this is more expensive than what we now do" (Doble Research Associates 1995b, p. 40; see also Flanagan 1996d, p. 84). And in Applegate, Colvin, and Fisher's (1997, p. 247) Ohio survey, more than eight in ten respondents agreed that "it is important to try to re-
habituate adults who have committed crimes and are now in the cor-
rectional system" (85.6 percent) and that "it is a good idea to provide treatment for chronic offenders" (85.9 percent) and "for offenders who are supervised by the courts and live in the com-
nunity" (85.9 percent). A majority of the sample even supported treat-
ment for chronic offenders, with 54.2 percent agreeing that "rehabi-
tilation programs should be available even for offenders who have been involved in a lot of crime in their lives."

Third, a limited amount of research has focused on whether citizens express support for rehabilitation after being asked to judge specific of-
fenses or vignettes. In a 1992 survey of 397 residents in Las Vegas, Nevada, area, McCorkle (1993) presented the respondents with brief scenarios of six street crimes: robbery, rape, molestation of several boys, burglary, selling drugs, and drug possession. They were then

asked to agree or disagree with eight statements about what to do with the offender in each scenario; four statements assessed attitudes toward punishment while the other four gauged attitudes toward rehabilita-
tion. There was clear support for dealing severely—including incapacit-
tating—these street criminals. Nonetheless, across the six offenses, o-
ly a third of the sample agreed that "trying to rehabilitate this per-
son would probably be a waste of time," while about 70 percent be-
lieved that "the offender would probably benefit from the psychologi-
cal counseling programs offered in prison" and that "more effort needs to be made to expand and improve programs that would give this of-
fender the chance to change his life." There was more antipathy about whether "educational and vocational programs" would make an offender "not commit crimes in the future." Still, almost half the sam-
ple agreed with this statement (McCorkle 1993, p. 246).

Similar results were reached by Applegate, Colvin, and Fisher (1997; see also Applegate 1997), using a factorial vignette method and having the respondents evaluate whether they endorsed rehabilitating the of-
fender described in the vignette. In addition to a variety of offender characteristics, each vignette focused on a stress crime that was punish-
able by incarceration in the state of Ohio. The vignette also stated that the offender was sentenced to prison, intensive supervision probation, or regular probation and that the offender was involved in a psycholog-
ical, educational, or vocational rehabilitation program (Applegate 1997). Again, over eight in ten respondents agreed, in reference to the offender portrayed in the vignette, that they supported "the use of re-
bilitation," that "it was right to put people like [the offender] in pro-
grams that try to cure the particular problem that caused them to break the law," that "this type of rehabilitation program should be ex-
panded," and that "trying to rehabilitate [the offender] will lessen the chances that he/she will go back into crime." Although less supportive, a clear majority—55.8 percent—also agreed that if the offender "succ-
cessfully completes his/her rehabilitation program, he/she should have the opportunity to have his/her sentence reduced" (Applegate, Colvin, and Fisher 1997, p. 248).

In short, whether respondents rate goals of imprisonment, global statements about offender rehabilitation, or crime-specific vignettes, they show consistent support for rehabilitation as an integral function of corrections. The American people can be punitive and can be skept-
tical about any policy that does not incapacitate violent offenders, but they also believe that the state should make a concerted effort to help
Public Opinion about Punishments and Corrections

Francis C. Mccutchen, Bonus S. Frisbie, and Randall K. Applegate

offenders change for the better. Future research might profit from examining whether the "slices" of studies used to estimate the public's views on criminal justice policy contain a cross-section of views that reflects the range of public opinion about punishment and correction.

A recent study by the Gallup Organization (1992) found that 67% of the public believe that "criminals get what they deserve," while 25% believe that "criminals get off too easily." The study also noted that public opinion about punishment and correction has not changed significantly over the past decade.

The study also noted that public opinion about punishment and correction has not changed significantly over the past decade. According to the study, the public's views on punishment and correction have remained relatively stable over the past 10 years, with a slight increase in support for tougher punishment and a slight decrease in support for rehabilitation programs.

In conclusion, public opinion about punishment and correction has remained relatively stable over the past decade. However, there is a growing concern about the effectiveness of punishment and correctional programs, and future research should focus on evaluating the impact of these programs on crime and recidivism.
public spending dollars on the “early intervention” programs as a significant portion of the overall spending on education, health, and social services. Costs are often based on the assumption that such investments can prevent crime and delinquency among youth, thereby saving society money in the long run. However, the evidence supporting these claims is mixed, and the long-term effects of early intervention programs are not yet fully understood.

C. Support for Early Intervention Programs

The support for early intervention programs is often based on the assumption that early intervention can prevent crime and delinquency among youth. However, the evidence supporting these claims is mixed, and the long-term effects of early intervention programs are not yet fully understood.

D. Mapping Public Opinion

The mapping of public opinion on crime and punishment is complex and often contentious. The public’s views on crime and punishment are shaped by a variety of factors, including personal experience, media coverage, and political influences. The mapping of public opinion is important for understanding the public’s attitudes and for informing policy decisions.

E. Correctional Policy

Correctional policy is a central part of the criminal justice system. It involves the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders, as well as the enforcement of laws. The effectiveness of correctional policy is often evaluated in terms of recidivism rates, or the tendency of offenders to reoffend.

F. Corrections and Public Opinion

The relationship between corrections and public opinion is complex and often contentious. The public’s views on crime and punishment are shaped by a variety of factors, including personal experience, media coverage, and political influences. The mapping of public opinion is important for understanding the public’s attitudes and for informing policy decisions.

G. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to recognize that crime and punishment are complex issues that are shaped by a variety of factors. The public’s views on crime and punishment are shaped by a variety of factors, including personal experience, media coverage, and political influences. The mapping of public opinion is important for understanding the public’s attitudes and for informing policy decisions.

H. Appendix

The appendix contains additional information and data that support the conclusions and findings presented in the main text. This information is included to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues discussed in the report.
Public Opinion about Punishment and Corrections

simple thesis: the more a proposed sentence or correctional policy has utility for the community, victims, and offenders, the more Americans will support it. This thesis offers a lesson for progressives: less punitive interventions generally will not be endorsed—regardless of appeals to the values of justice and humanity—if they do not also have demonstrable utility.


The American public is risk averse. It sees no reason to “take chances” with offenders who have shown that they will physically hurt others. Although not enamored with the effectiveness of prisons—and sophisticated criminological debate aside (cf. Clear 1994 with Bennett, DiFalco, and Walters 1996)—it is “common sense” to people that offenders not on the street will not hurt them. Placing dangerous people in the community is not understandable. However, almost any option—except pro forma, unsupervised probation—is open for discussion when weighing what to do with the so-called nonviolent offender, even those who have been habitually criminal. Imprisonment is an acceptable option, but so, too, are intermediate sanctions. Deciding who does or does not qualify as a “violent” offender is a key issue in determining which lawbreakers fall on which side of this policy divide. Further, although an uphill struggle, all this does not mean that citizens will always reject community-based alternatives for violent offenders. The argument for doing so, however, will have to be awfully good.

5. The Public Continues to Believe That Rehabilitation Should Be a Goal of the Correctional System.

The enormous criticism of correctional treatment, sustained now for three decades, has not succeeded in debunking rehabilitation in the public’s eyes. Americans are perhaps less idealistic than they once were about the ability to change lawbreakers; they realize that treatment programs in prison may only succeed with a limited number of inmates. Still, they believe that corrections should, at least in part, involve the process of “correcting” offenders. Possibly, the belief that all but the most wicked can be saved is so deeply ingrained in the American cultural heritage that we, as a people, are not going to relinquish the correctional system to the darker philosophies of vengeance and warehousing. Rehabilitation offers the rare combination of morality and utility; it is possible to invest in and seek the betterment of offenders while simultaneously enhancing public safety (“I would rather have them come out better than they went in”). Progressives—especially those who have rejected offender treatment—may
to consider that the rehabilitative ideal remains one of the most
valued and culturally sensitive criteria for our criminal penal
system (Pencey-Ward, 1990). Support for "rehabilitation" among
Americans is not unconditional, however. A study by the National
Institute of Justice (1992b) revealed that the majority of adults
believe that the primary goal of the criminal justice system is
to punish offenders, not to rehabilitate them. This suggests that
"rehabilitation" is a term used more to describe the fact that
offenders are not punished for their crimes than to promote
positive change in the offenders themselves.

6. Public Support, Child Safety. Support for "rehabilitation" tends to decrease after the crime is committed, and there is a noticeable shift in public opinion toward a more punitive approach. This shift is particularly evident when considering the case of a child who has experienced abuse.

We must not confuse the "rehabilitation" process with the judicial process. The latter is primarily concerned with justice, while the former is concerned with the well-being of the individual. The two should be seen as complementary rather than as alternatives. The public must be educated about the importance of rehabilitation as a means of promoting the well-being of the individual and society.

The study of public opinion about crime-related policies offers
important insights into the prevailing attitudes and values in society. It is crucial to understand these attitudes and values in order to develop effective policies that address the impact of crime on individuals and communities.

The study of public opinion about crime-related policies offers
important insights into the prevailing attitudes and values in society. It is crucial to understand these attitudes and values in order to develop effective policies that address the impact of crime on individuals and communities.
The events of the day may be manipulated by politicians and the media, and public opinion may change in response to these events. However, in the long term, public opinion is driven by more permanent factors such as economic conditions, social norms, and personal values. Politicians and the media may try to influence public opinion, but they cannot change it overnight. In the short term, public opinion may be swayed by immediate events, but in the long term, it is shaped by more enduring factors. This is why it is important to understand the underlying factors that drive public opinion, rather than simply reacting to the latest news or opinion polls.
mental continuities and changes—factors that affect so much else in people’s lives—may also play a role in shaping their views on punishment and corrections.

Sexton, in a recent study using data from the 1995 British Crime Survey, Hough and Roberts (1998, 1999) found that respondents both had limited awareness of sanctions other than imprisonment and underestimated the harshness of the sentences actually imposed on offenders. Almost four in five respondents believed that sentences were too lenient to “some degree,” while one in two thought that the sanctions were “much too lenient.” Even so, when asked to rate a specific case in which the offender—a burglar—was actually given a three-year sentence, the respondents assigned a median prison term of twelve months, a “result that might surprise those who believe that the British public are highly punitive” (Hough and Roberts 1999, p. 20). Further, when given a menu of possible sanctions, including noncustodial penalties, almost half the sample favored a sentence that did not involve imprisonment.

Notably, if the nationality of the sample had not been disclosed, one might have thought that the study had been conducted in the United States: the findings for the British sample are strikingly similar to the views expressed on surveys by U.S. residents. There is a tendency in cross-national research to emphasize how peoples diverge in their views; and, to be sure, understanding how cultural factors differently shape views toward sanctioning is an important task (see, e.g., Sanders, Hamilton, and Yasu 1998). Still, the commonality in opinions among citizens of different nations is equally important to investigate. Why do shared views, as well as shared gaps in knowledge, exist? Is this phenomenon a by-product of the broad social force of modernization that cross-cuts thinking into limited categories? Or, in the other extreme, might sociology provide the answer, with certain qualities of the brain and adaptive orientations rooted in evolution restricting how humans, regardless of location, think about conduct, like crime, that threatens their safety (Wilson 1996, pp. 226–27)? Further, what does all this say about the role of public opinion in shaping correctional policy cross-nationally? If thinking about crime and punishment falls within a limited range of variation, what then accounts for cross-national differences in penal practices?

Many more topics could be listed that warrant detailed investigation: gender differences in public opinion about punishment and how these might be illuminated by theories emphasizing how men and women

hold distinctive views of justice; how broader theories of public opinion might direct research on citizens’ views on crime-related policies (Kinder 1998); and how respondents’ use of computers to complete surveys might affect their willingness to disclose their opinions, especially on sensitive topics (Turner et al. 1998)—to name but a few issues. But if the roster of topics to study seems virtually unending, in another, albeit limited, way additional future research is unlikely to revise what we now know.

Two decades ago, Sherman and Hawkins (1981, p. 64) commented that “our knowledge of public opinion about breakfast food is far deeper than our knowledge of public opinion about criminal justice.” This assessment may still be accurate, but only because marketing researchers know a great deal about breakfast food, not because social science insight into public opinion has not substantially advanced. We hasten to reiterate the need for more research to firm up and flesh out our understanding of what people want done with lawbreakers. Nonetheless, we also want to counter any suspicions that knowledge about public opinion remains shallow. We have now accumulated enough research that the basic parameters of public opinion about punishment and corrections outlined earlier in this section are unlikely to be substantially revised as further research appears (see Roberts 1992; Roberts and Stalans 1997, 1998). In particular, we should have a measure of confidence that members of the public, although punitive in important ways, hold a complex vision of corrections that includes the capacity to temper harsh sentiments and to endorse a range of policies that seek the betterment of offenders. We end this essay with the policy implications of this central finding.

C. Policy Implications

By the mid-1970s, the United States had experienced a dramatic shift in correctional paradigms (Cullen and Gilbert 1982). Prior to this time, there was a notion—admittedly too infrequently realized in practice (Rothman 1980)—that concerted efforts should be made to reform the wayward. Consistent with the thrust of the welfare state, there was a sense that the government should invest resources in offenders with the intent of fixing the defects, psychological and social, that had led them astray. Since this time, however, there has been a steady effort to make punishments longer and life for offenders—whether under community supervision or inside prisons—more painful. The major investment has been in prisons and in the technology
of supervision, not in people. Clear (1994) has used the term “penal harm movement” to capture this paradigm shift and the array of policies enacted explicitly to discomfort offenders. Although later in developing and perhaps less strident in its embrace of harming offenders, similar trends appear in other contexts, such as Canada (Roberts, Nutfield, and Hann 1999) and Great Britain (Sparks 1986; Hough and Roberts 1999).

Any meaningful policy discussion, at least in the United States, must start by confronting the question inherent in this “get tough” or “penal harm” movement. This obligation seems especially required in the case of public opinion. To be honest, we do not know what particular role public opinion has played in underwriting the vitality of this punishment movement, but it is clearly implicated in sustaining it. For much of the past three decades, the idea of a “punitive public” has been used to legitimate virtually every law that has increased the punishment of offenders (Schebold 1984; Calles, Clark, and Iozzi 1985; Beckett 1997). To cite but one of many recent examples, Ditton and Wilcox (1999, p. 2) argue that “over the past two decades, sentencing requirements and release policies have become more restrictive, primarily in response to widespread ‘get tough on crime’ attitudes in the Nation.”

These claims likely are not without some merit. Citizens do harbor punitive sentiments and, conversely, do not use their vote to throw get-tough legislators, prosecutors, and judges out of office. Still, claims linking harsh policies to public opinion risk creating a distorted reality that obscures consideration of a wider range of policy options. The very notion of a punitive public too often obscures more fruitful policy discussions, prompting the refrain that the “public will never support” a given progressive initiative. It is instructive that surveys reveal that policy makers inevitably overestimate rather than underestimate the punitiveness of the public (Roberts 1985; Roberts and Stalans 1997).

Further, in a democratic nation, to undermine legitimacy attaches to the claim that one’s position reflects the public’s collective will. Those who challenge the public’s view—who depict that average citizen as ill-informed or as suffering false consciousness—run the risk of being called an “elitist” or a “so-called expert” who is “out of touch” with the “common man and woman.” Advocates of the punishment paradigm often rely in the polling numbers that ostensibly show that the public wants to put offenders to death or behind bars. It is why they argue that the “people know best.”

The portrayal of public opinion as exclusively punitive thus serves as a potentially powerful social reality that inhibits efforts to choose a different correctional future. It makes policy makers wary of appearing too liberal on crime-related issues; it places advocates of a progressive correctional paradigm in the position of appearing antideocratic. Revisions of public opinion, such as ours, we hope, can serve to challenge or “deconstruct” this reality. Our central message—based on a growing body of survey data—is that citizens want their correctional system to be more than a machine for inflicting harm. Lifetime imprisonment rather than capital punishment, alternatives to incarceration, restorative justice, investing in offenders through rehabilitation, and early prevention programs—all these policies are the public is willing to consider if they are implemented in a responsible way.

In the end, public opinion is not an intractable barrier to developing a balanced, rather than a punitive, agenda for responding to offenders. We should not claim too much for citizens; there is no evidence that they are clamoring for a reversal of current correctional policy. Yet neither should we claim too little, as is most often the case in popular commentaries about “what the public wants.” The ideological space exists for reforms that reflect both progressive sentiments and demonstrable utility. Moving in this direction thus depends not on changing the public but on questioning the political will to do so.