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Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab Poll: Majority of Iowans Support Racial Justice Policing Reforms

According to a recent Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab Poll, a majority of Iowans support multiple racial justice policing and sentencing reforms, but fewer than half of Iowans support increased penalties for protestors and cities. The online poll, designed by University of Iowa faculty and students as a research project, surveyed 883 voting-age Iowans between Feb. 10 and Feb. 25, 2022.

A majority of Iowans support collecting police traffic stop data to reduce racial profiling, prohibiting disparate treatment of minorities by law enforcement, and reducing sentences for non-violent drug offenders. Specifically, the survey found that 56.1% of respondents support collecting traffic stop data, 58.7% support reducing sentences, and 61.2% support prohibiting disparate treatment. The latter two were part of a series of proposals put forth in 2020 by Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds' FOCUS Committee on Criminal Justice Reform. Respondents were also asked if they support increased penalties for protest-related crimes and if they support a reduction of state funding for cities that reduce police funding. The survey found that 38.7% of Iowans who responded supported increased penalties, and 43.9% supported the reduction in state funding. The first of these two policies became law in 2021 as part of the Back the Blue Act.

Responses to these reforms were investigated and notable differences were found when comparing responses based on the respondents' political party affiliation. Those who self-identified as Republicans were more likely to support increased penalties for protest-related crimes and a reduction in state funding to cities that defunded their police, whereas Democrats were more likely to oppose these reforms. Similarly, 51.7% of Republicans supported increased penalties compared to 30.7% of Democrats; 66.0% of Republicans supported the reduction in funding compared to 28.7% of Democrats; and 45.3% and 40.6% of Democrats opposed these reforms, respectively.

When looking at the three racial justice reforms, a majority of Democrats supported all of them, along with a plurality of Republicans. Specifically, 72.7% of Democrats supported the collection of police traffic stop data to reduce racial profiling, 73.6% supported the prohibition of disparate treatment of minorities by law enforcement, and 70.4% supported the reduction of sentences for non-violent drug offenders. On the other hand, 40.5% of Republicans supported the collection of traffic stop data, 48.8% supported the prohibition of disparate treatment, and 50.5% supported the reduction of sentences.

Based on the racial justice and increased penalty reforms, responses followed a similar trend across the type of community that respondents reported residing in. In terms of the racial justice reforms, respondents tend to show less support moving from urban to rural area. When asked about collecting information on who police stop in order to reduce racial profiling by law enforcement, 31.2% of urban respondents strongly supported this, whereas only 19.1% of rural respondents did. When prohibiting disparate treatment of minority populations by law enforcement, 36.0% of

respondents from urban communities strongly support this reform compared to 27.5% of residents from rural communities. With reducing sentences for non-violent drug and property crimes, 35.7% of urban respondents strongly support the reform, while 25.8% of rural residents strongly support this. Regarding the increased penalties for protestors and cities, rural communities tend to support the ideas in comparison to urban communities. When asked about reducing state funding for cities that reduce police funding, 48.1% of rural respondents supported the reform idea, while 40.3% of urban respondents did. Following a similar trend, when asked about increasing criminal penalties for protest-related crimes, 38.5% of respondents living in rural areas supported this, whereas 33.7% of respondents living in urban areas showed support.

A respondent's level of Iowa news consumption also affected their support for reforms. Specifically, in terms of the racial justice reforms, the less a respondent watched the news, the less they supported those reforms. When asked about collecting information on who police stop in order to reduce racial profiling by law enforcement, 46.7% of respondents who watched the news all the time strongly supported this claim compared to only 22.3% respondents who hardly ever watched the news. This trend continued to opposition with 9.0% of respondents who hardly ever watched the news strongly opposed to prohibit disparate treatment of minority populations by law enforcement and 6.4% who watched the news all the time of residents strongly opposed.

Lastly, support of police reforms shows a slight trend of increasing support moving from lower to higher income groups, although not consistently across all five reforms. Opinions on criminal penalties for protest related crimes were mixed, with most groups having strong percentage of neutrality. However, as income increases, there appears to be a trend of increasing support for these penalties. Less distinct results are found in terms of state funding for police, but there appears to be a slight trend of increased support reduction of police funding in higher income groups. Moving toward more progressive reforms, a majority of people support collecting information on who police stop in order to reduce racial profiling by law enforcement in all categories, and the percentage who support appears to increase as income increases. Likewise with stop data, there is majority support for the prohibition of disparate treatment of minority populations by law enforcement, and the percentage of support increases as moving to the higher income groups. Finally, there is majority support for criminal sentencing reform to reduce sentences for non-violent drug and property crimes in all groups; however, there was no clear relationship between the support and the level of income.

Respondent identification: The Iowa Social Science Research Center (ISRC) contracted with a respected web panel vendor to field the survey to a demographically representative sample of up to 900 respondents. Respondents invited to complete the web survey were Iowa adults, aged 18-120 years, recruited for participation via web panel. To obtain a census-representative sample, quotas were set on the following demographics: sex, age, and urbanicity.

Sample: 883 voting-age residents in Iowa, margin of error +/-3.4%.

Weighting: Reported results are weighted by age, sex, and party identification.

About the Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab

The poll was designed by the Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab, comprised of University of Iowa faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. The Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab is co-directed by Frederick J. Boehmke, professor of political science and Kajsja Dalrymple, professor of journalism and mass communication. The poll is a teaching, research, and service project, and was

implemented in collaboration with the Iowa Social Science Research Center directed by Frederick J. Boehmke. The UI Public Policy Center provided support for this poll as part of its student success mission, intended to expand experiential policy-relevant research for UI students.

Michael May, Sam Avery, and Stephanie Gutierrez, research fellows for the Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab, assisted with the preparation of this release.

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