OREGON
LAW ENFORCEMENT
COUNCIL

OREGON SERIOUS CRIME SURVEY 1982 UPDATE

The Attitudes of Oregonians about Crime and the Criminal Justice System

SEPTEMBER, 1982

INTRODUCTION

This bulletin is about citizens' perceptions of crime, their opinions about current criminal justice issues, and their involvement in crime prevention activities. The information comes from the annual Survey of Serious Crime conducted by the Oregon Law Enforcement Council.

This survey has been conducted annually since 1978 and is run during March and April of each year. The survey form contains questions on three topics: citizens' experiences as victims of crime; their use of crime prevention techniques; and their perception of crime and opinions about certain criminal justice issues.

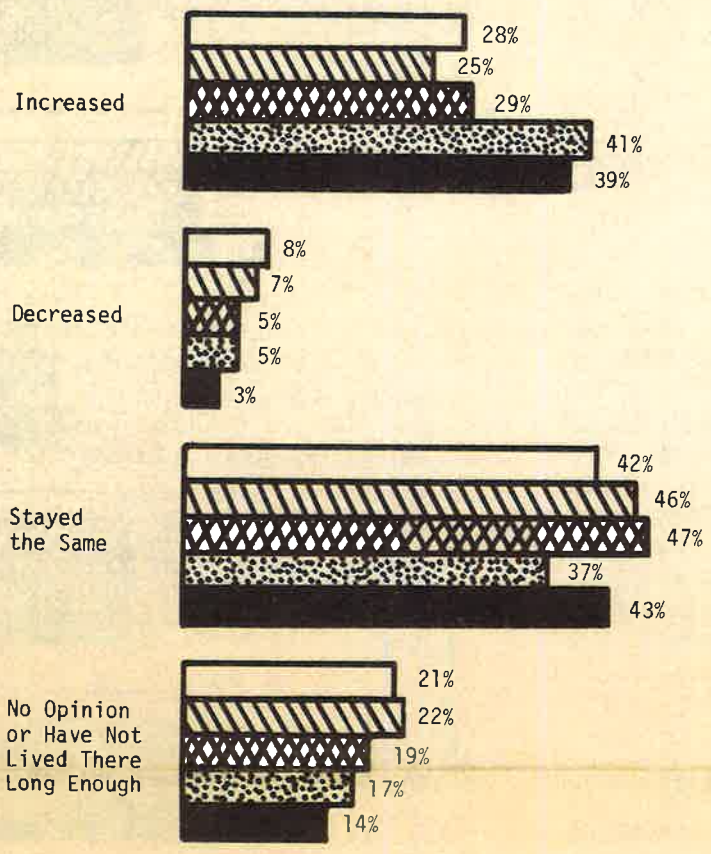
As in previous years, survey questionnaires were mailed to a random sample of 1,500 citizens drawn from the Oregon drivers' license file. This year, 1,037 completed questionnaires were returned--representing 69.1 percent of the total sample and 79.7 percent of the surveys which reached the individuals to whom they were mailed (i.e., excluding those returned as nonforwardable by the post office). Once again, this is an exceptionally high rate of return for a mail-out survey.

Perception of Crime

Last year's survey indicated a substantial change in the perception of crime--41 percent of the respondents thought crime had increased in their neighborhood, as compared to 25 percent in 1979. Results from this year's survey are similar to those obtained in 1981. Thirty-nine percent felt neighborhood crime had increased, and only three percent felt crime had decreased (as opposed to 5% last year and 8% in 1978). During this time period (1978-1981), the number of crimes reported to the police increased every year.

Thirty-three percent of the respondents said they expected to be victims of crime in the coming year, and another 27 percent offered no opinion one way or the other. Most of those expecting to be victimized indicated either burglary (40.8%) or theft (40.6%) when asked of what crime they expected to be victims.

Perception of How Neighborhood Crime Changed from Previous Year

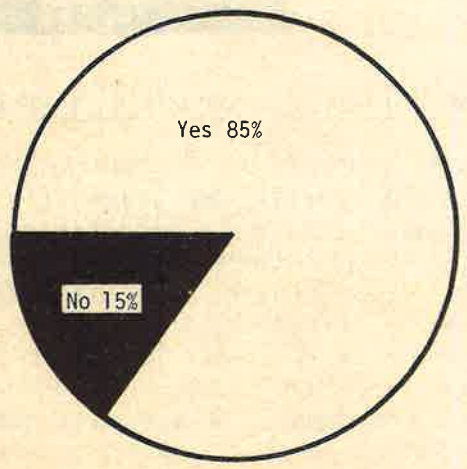


Capital Punishment

Capital punishment was reinstated in Oregon in 1979, but the law was subsequently invalidated by the State Supreme Court. The results of the 1982 survey again demonstrate a very high level of support for the death penalty in Oregon. Eighty-five percent of the respondents indicated that they favored the use of capital punishment in some circumstances (the 1981 survey showed 84% in favor).

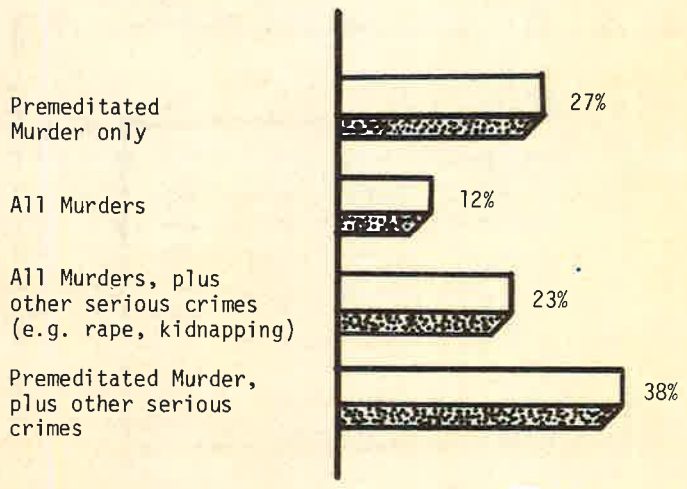
A majority of citizens supported the use of the death penalty for serious crimes other than murder, such as rape and kidnapping. The largest percentage of respondents favoring capital punishment (38%) thought the death penalty should be used for premeditated murder and other serious crimes.

Support for Death Penalty



It has been suggested that one reason for the high level of support for the death penalty is the fact that a "life sentence" does not actually mean life imprisonment--that a sentenced individual will still be eligible for release on parole in a certain number of years. This year a question was added to the survey to assess whether a mandatory life sentence (i.e., no chance of parole or other release) was viewed as preferable to capital punishment. While a majority (57%) of those initially supporting the death penalty favored having the option of imposing either a full life sentence or the death penalty, less than nine percent indicated that they would support a mandatory life sentence instead of the death penalty.

Crimes for Which Death Penalty Should be Used



COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

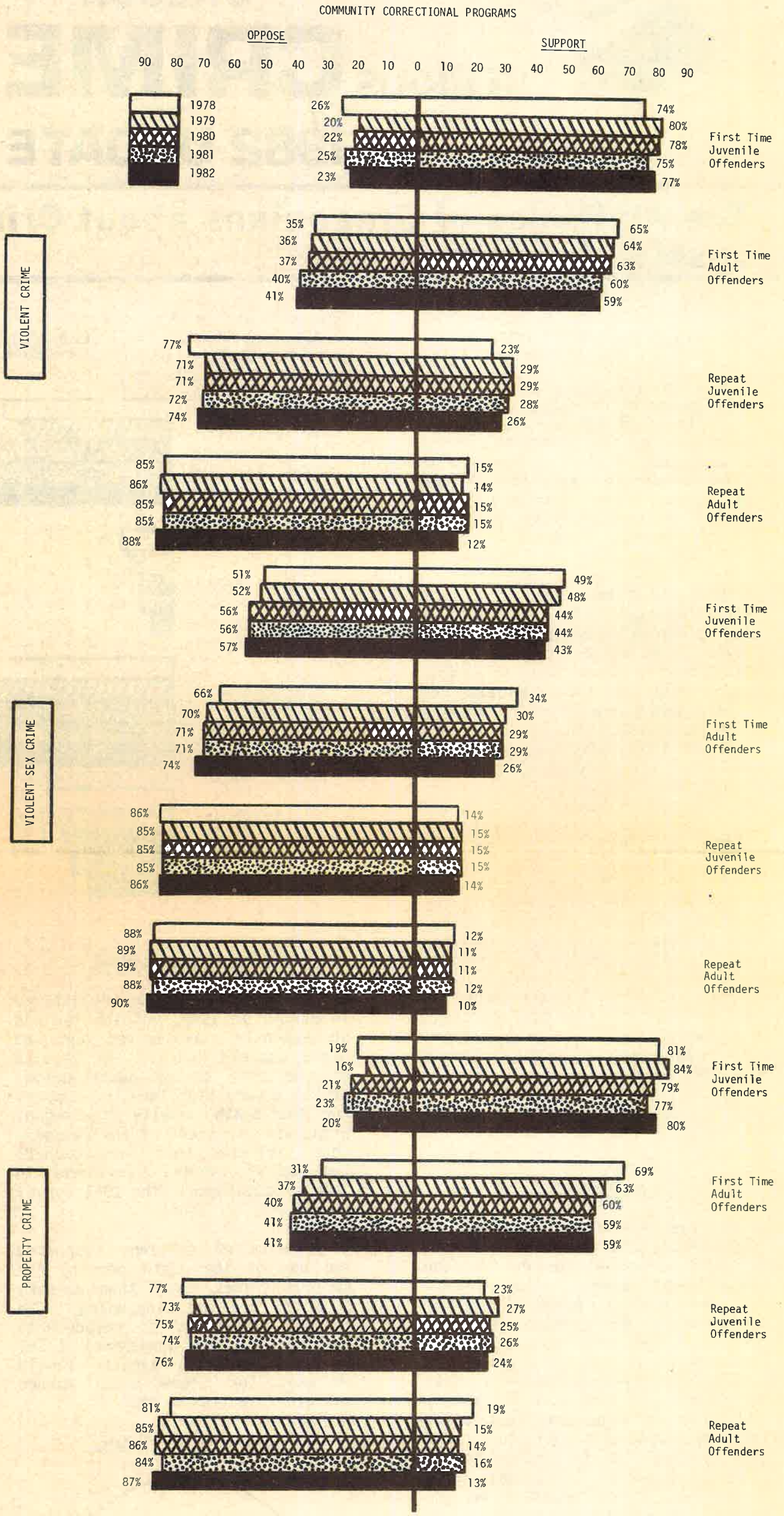
The 1977 Community Corrections Act provided state funds for counties to develop and maintain individualized local programs for offenders convicted of misdemeanors and less serious felonies. Components of these local programs could include probation, halfway houses, restitution, work release centers, and community services. During the 1979 Legislative Session a similar program was developed for juveniles.

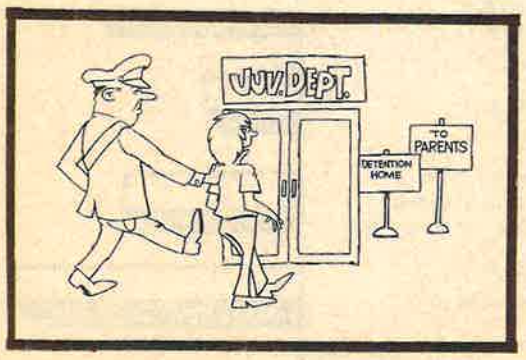
Attempts to locate correctional facilities such as halfway houses or work release centers within the community have frequently been met with very vocal resistance. For the last five years the survey has included a section designed to clarify the relative degrees of support and opposition with regard to community treatment of offenders.

Citizens were asked whether they supported such projects as halfway houses or work release centers in their neighborhood. In answering this question, respondents were asked to distinguish between offenders convicted of three types of crimes--property, violent, and violent sex--and between juvenile or adult offenders who are first time or repeat offenders. This gave twelve combinations for response.

In the accompanying chart, responses for all years' surveys are portrayed. Generally, there is substantial support for community correction programs when they involve first time violent or property crime offenders. There is little support for the use of such programs for repeat offenders of any type. For offenders convicted of violent sex crimes, there is some support for involving first offenders in community corrections programs but considerably less than for the other types of offenders. In all cases there was more support for programs involving juveniles than for adults.

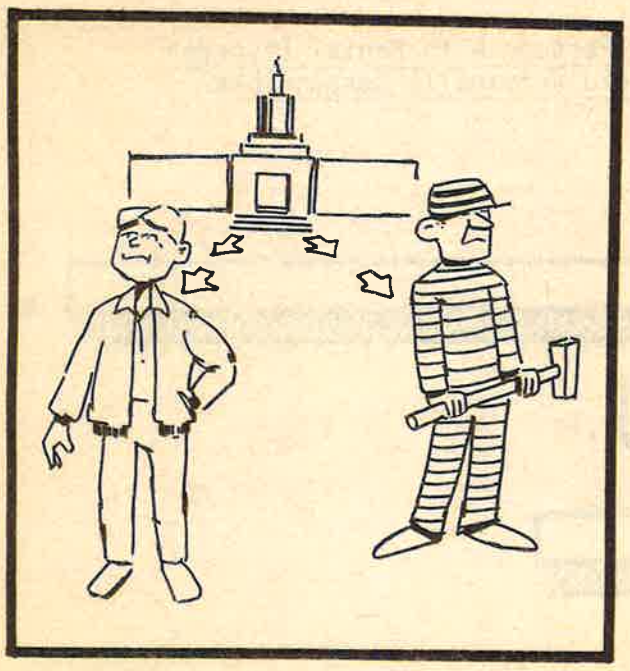
The most significant trend since the initial survey in 1978 is the decline in support for community programs involving first-time adult offenders. The percentage of respondents favoring programs for first time adult property offenders has dropped from 69 percent to 59 percent. For first-time adult sex offenders, the decrease was from 34 percent to 26 percent, and for first time adult violent offenders, the drop was from 65 percent to 59 percent. This year, even fewer people than in previous years favored community programs for any type of repeat adult offenders.





Tax Dollars for Juvenile Programs

Though support for community programs for first-time adult offenders has declined significantly, there has not been a corresponding drop with regard to first-time juvenile offenders convicted of property or violent nonsexual offense (see the section on corrections programs). A separate question asked whether citizens would support a greater use of their tax dollar for programs intended to prevent juvenile offenders from becoming adult criminals. Seventy-one percent said they would support the use of tax revenues for such programs, 12 percent were opposed and 17 percent were undecided. This suggests that there will continue to be a great deal of support for the idea of juvenile treatment programs as long as they are perceived to be having some impact on future behavior.



Rank Order of Recommended Alternatives To Relieve Overcrowding of Correctional Facilities

	Score*
Build Maximum Security Institution	1511
Build Regional Jails	1226
Build More Work Camps	966
Build More Work Release Centers/Half-way Houses	673
Put More Offenders in Expanded Probation with More Intensive Supervision (i.e., with increased funding for staff and services)	538
Put More Offenders in Existing Probation Programs (i.e., with no increase in staff or services)	187
Release More Prisoners Early	55

*The score was developed by giving 3 points to a number 1 recommendation, 2 to a number 2 recommendation and 1 to a number 3 recommendation.

Purpose of Institutions

In 1979 a question was added to the survey to determine what people perceived as the most important purpose of correctional institutions--rehabilitation of prisoners, punishment of criminal offenders, or protection of society (through isolation of offenders). As shown, most people feel that the protection of society should be the primary purpose of correctional institutions. Rehabilitation ranked second and punishment third.

There has been a definite change in the response to this question since 1979. The number of citizens citing protection of society as the most important has increased significantly (from 59% to 69%), while the number viewing rehabilitation as primary has sharply decreased (from 29% to 18%). This may indicate that a growing number of people are doubting the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs and instead favor a "keep criminals off the streets" approach.

Institutional Overcrowding and the Corrections Bond Measure

Attempts to deal with prison overcrowding in Oregon has resulted in an ongoing legal struggle and two unsuccessful ballot measures. Survey respondents were asked what alternatives they would recommend to relieve overcrowding of correctional facilities. Their response clearly showed a preference for secure confinement of prisoners. Building a new maximum security institution was rated as the best alternative, followed by regional jails and work camps. Work release centers/ halfway houses and expanded probation received less support. There was virtually no support for the early release of prisoners.

In May, 1982 a $60 million Corrections Bond was defeated by the voters. A question on the bond measure--included in the survey to provide preliminary information to decision-makers-- showed 38 percent in favor, 24 percent opposed, and 38 percent undecided. In the previous year's survey, 76 percent of the respondents favored construction of a medium security prison costing $30 million. This, along with the rankings of alternatives to overcrowding, suggests several reasons for the defeat of the May, 1982 bond measure:

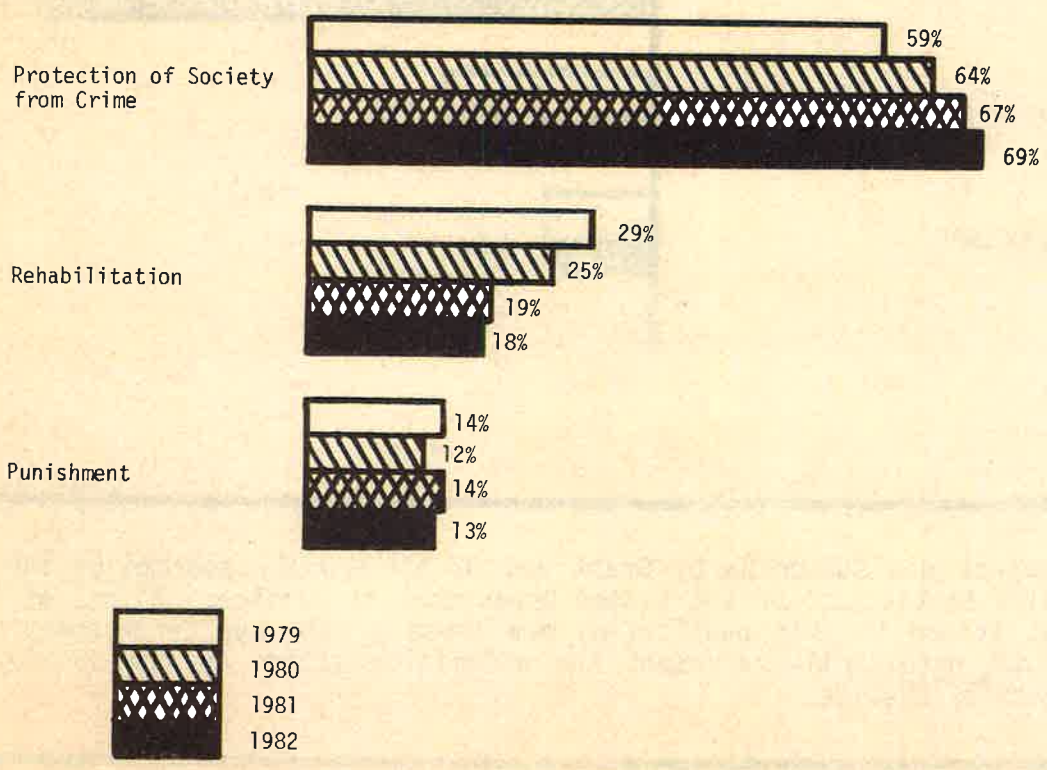
1. The measure resulted in a rather complex array of programs, products, and responsibilities. The high percentage of respondents who were undecided at the time of the survey may indicate that some citizens found the bond measure difficult to understand.

2. The emphasis in the bond measure was not on providing secure institutional space, which the survey indicates has the highest level of public support. It is worth noting that support for building a maximum security institution was highest among those opposed to the bond measure.

3. Given the general economic conditions and the shortfalls in state revenues, there may have been concern with the $60 million cost.

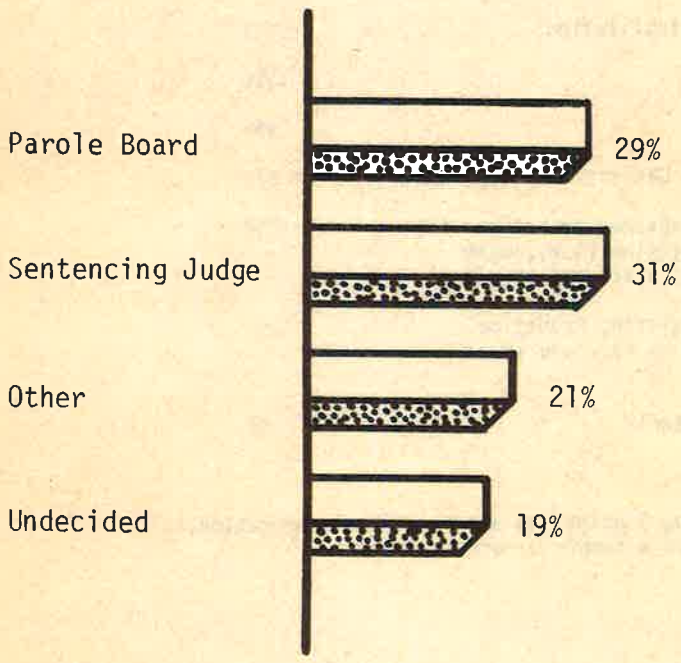
In summary it would appear that, in addition to economic considerations, citizens may have been troubled by the complexity of the corrections bond measure and the lack of emphasis on secure institutional space.

What is the Most Important Purpose of Correctional Institutions?

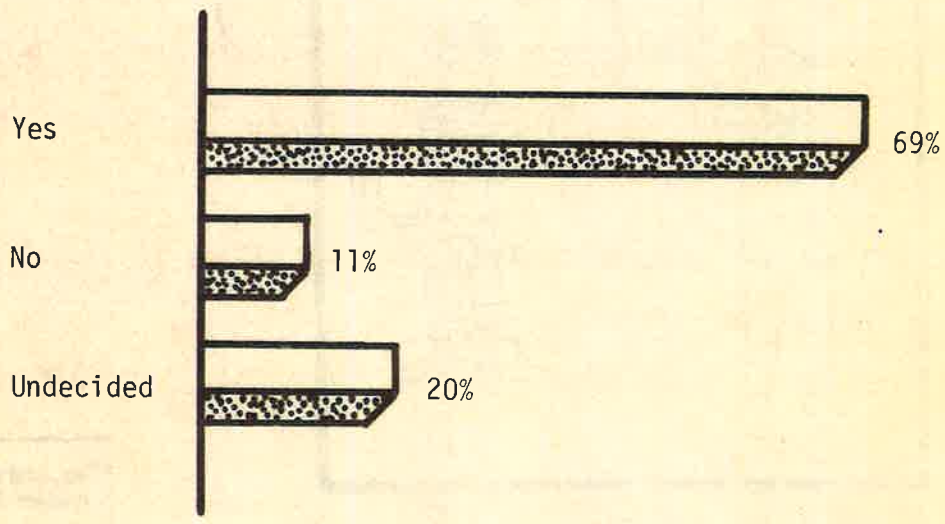


This publication contains no data tables, results of statistical tests, or copies of the survey form. Readers wishing to obtain more complete information than is reported here should contact the Oregon Law Enforcement Council, 2001 Front Street N.E., Salem, Oregon 97310, (503) 378-4229.

Who Should Make Parole Release Decision?



Should Persons with Mental Disorder Be Held Criminally Responsible?



Parole Release Decision

The Oregon Parole Board has, within the framework of an established set of guidelines, final responsibility for making the decision to parole a prisoner from state institutions. The Board has been the center of a great deal of controversy in recent years.

This year a question was added to the survey asking citizens whether they felt the parole release decision should be made by the parole board, the sentencing judge, or some other entity. Thirty-one percent thought the sentencing judge should make the final release decision, 29 percent favored the parole board, 21 percent wanted some other process, and 19 percent were undecided. Thus, while there seems to be a lot of dissatisfaction with the present operation of the parole board, there is no apparent consensus as to what the process for making institutional release decisions should be. Many of the persons whose response was "other" suggested an arrangement with joint responsibility for the release decision (parole board and sentencing judge, sentencing judge and a citizens commission, parole board and victim, etc.).

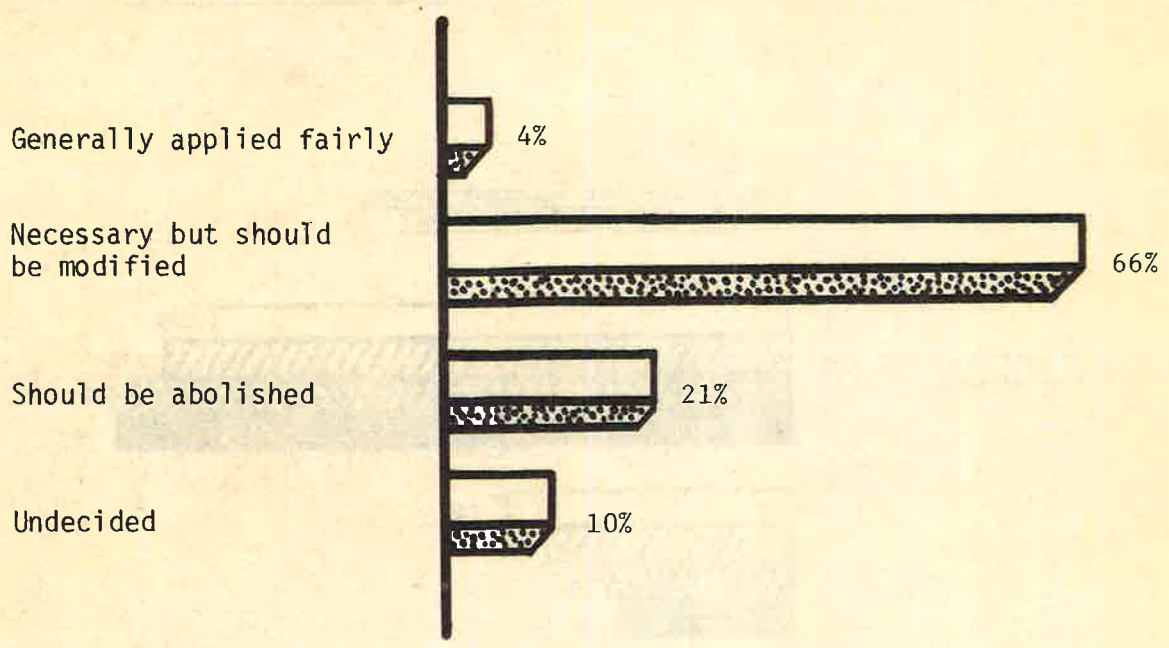
Criminal Responsibility and The Insanity Defense

Under present Oregon law, under certain circumstances a person may be judged not responsible for criminal behavior due to mental disease or defect (insanity). Such an individual would now become the ward of the Mental Health Division. This year, the survey asked citizens whether they felt that a person who commits a crime and suffers from a mental disorder should be held criminally responsible as long as mental treatment is available in state correctional facilities.

Sixty-nine percent felt persons with mental disorders should be held criminally responsible, 11 percent believed they should not be, and 20 percent were undecided.

In a closely related question, individuals were asked how they felt about the way in which the "insanity defense" is presently applied. The general perception of the "insanity defense" as it now exists proved to be overwhelmingly negative. Less than four percent of the respondents felt that it was generally applied fairly and appropriately. Sixty-six percent thought the insanity defense was necessary but used too frequently and needed to be modified, while 21 percent felt it should be abolished entirely. It should be noted that survey returns were completed before the Hinckley trial and thus do not simply present a reaction to the recent wave of media attention.

Insanity Defense as Presently Applied



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Rank Order of Community Problems

1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
1. Property Tax	Cost of Livi g	Cost of Living	Cost of Living	Unemployment
2. Drug/Alcohol Abuse	Alcohol Abuse	Property Tax	Unemployment	Cost of Living
3. Cost of Living	Property Tax	Alcohol Abuse	Alcohol Abuse	Property Tax
4. Juvenile Delinquency	Drug Abuse	Drug Abuse	Drug Abuse	Alcohol Abuse
5. Property Crime	Violent Crime	Unemployment	Property Crime	Drug Abuse
6. Land Use/Zoning	Juvenile Delinquency	Juvenile Delinquency	Property Tax	Property Crime
7. Quality of Education	Property Crime	Property Crime	Juvenile Delinquency	Juvenile Delinquency
8. Unemployment	Quality of Education	Land Use/Zoning	Violent Crime	Violent Crime
9. Pollution/Environment	Unemployment	Quality of Education	Quality of Education	Quality of Education
10. Violent Crime	Pollution/Environment	Violent Crime	Land Use/Zoning	Poverty
11. Poverty	Poverty	Pollution/Environment	Poverty	Land Use/Zoning
12. White Collar Crime	Land Use/Zoning	Poverty	Pollution/Environment	Pollution/Environment
13. Domestic Violence	White Collar Crime	White Collar Crime	White Collar Crime	Domestic Violence
14. Race Relations	Domestic Violence	Domestic Violence	Domestic Violence	White Collar Crime

Community Problems

For each year's survey respondents have been asked to rate the seriousness of 14 community problems. The ranking of these problems for all surveys is shown above.

This year unemployment was rated the number one community problem by a wide margin. Unemployment was ranked second in 1981 and only ninth in 1979. The cost of living, which has been rated as the number one problem for the last three years, fell to second behind unemployment. Property tax, which dropped to sixth last year, moved back up to third place. Alcohol abuse and drug abuse were ranked fourth and fifth, respectively. Property crime was rated sixth this year, down from fifth a year ago and directly above juvenile delinquency (7th) and violent crime (8th). White collar crime replaced domestic violence as the problem generating the lowest level of community concern.

Budget Cuts for Police

The 1982 survey indicated little change in the rankings of which functions to retain and which functions to reduce if police budgets are cut. There was a high degree of agreement that the investigation of serious violent crime is the most important function to retain. This function was rated two times as high as any other. Emergency response, investigations of serious property crimes, and hard drug investigations were considered the next most important functions. As the illustration shows, these scored in the 600-750 range. A third grouping of functions consisted of community patrols, traffic enforcement, crime analysis, and crime prevention. These scored from 140-390.

Functions considered least important to retain were investigation of minor violent crime, equipment purchases, complaint response, crowd control, investigation of victimless crime and investigation of minor property crime.

When respondents were asked which functions should be reduced first, the results were similar. There was substantial agreement that response to complaints, crowd control, and investigation of victimless crime should be reduced first. The next group of functions received a much lower score (200-450). They were crime prevention, equipment purchase and traffic enforcement. The remaining functions all scored below 200.

Functions Most Important to Retain if Police Budgets are Cut

	Rank	Score*
Violent Crime Investigation	1	Scored over 1800
Emergency Response	2)	
Property Crime Investigation	3)	Scored 600-750
Hard Drug Investigation	4)	
Community Patrols	5)	
Traffic Enforcement	6)	Scored 140-390
Crime Analysis	7)	
Crime Prevention	8)	
Investigate Minor Violent Crime	9)	
Equipment Purchase	10)	
Complaint Response	11)	Scored less than 80
Investigate Victimless Crime	12)	
Crowd Control	13)	
Investigate Minor Property Crime	14)	

Functions to be Reduced First if Police Budgets are Cut

	Rank	Score*
Crowd Control	1)	
Complaint Response	2)	Scored 800 or more
Investigate Victimless Crime	3)	
Crime Prevention	4)	
Equipment Purchase	5)	Scored 200-450
Crime Analysis	6)	
Traffic Enforcement	7)	
Investigate Minor Property Crime	8)	Scored 100-200
Investigate Minor Violent Crime	9)	
Community Patrols	10)	
Hard Drug Investigation	11)	
Emergency Response	12)	Scored less than 100
Violent Crime Investigation	13)	
Property Crime Investigation	14)	

*The score was developed by allowing 3 points for a function marked number 1, 2 points for a function marked number 2, and 1 point for one marked 3. A composite score was compiled by adding all respondents' scores.

CRIME PREVENTION ACTIVITIES

A full report on citizens' involvement in crime prevention activities (Do Oregonians Use Crime Prevention Techniques) was published by OLEC in January of this year. Data from the 1982 survey do not reveal any major changes in this area. Most citizens have received crime prevention information from sources such as television, newspapers, and radio. More importantly, most respondents indicated that they had taken some action during the past year. Over half of the respondents had contacted neighbors about watching each others houses, and a third had improved locks. Residents of the Portland area generally reported a higher level of involvement in crime prevention activities than citizens in other parts of the state. Sixty percent of the individuals surveyed reported having a gun in their home. Thirty-seven percent of those owning a gun viewed it as a means of protection against crime.

Steps Taken to Make Property More Secure

	Percentage
Contacted neighbors to watch one another's home	56%
Improved locks on doors and windows	34%
Improved lighting of home and yard	22%
Improved visibility of property (trim hedges, trees, etc.)	15%
Engraved valuable property with identification number (Oregon driver's license number)	15%
Placed warning decals on windows and doors	11%
Installed burglar alarms	3%
Other security measures	3%

SUMMARY

* Thirty-nine percent of the citizens surveyed thought that crime in their neighborhood had increased while only three percent felt that it had decreased. Most of those who thought they were likely to be victimized during the next year expected the crime to be either burglary or theft.

* Eighty-five percent of the respondents support capital punishment and a majority favor the use of the death penalty for serious offenses other than murder. Less than nine percent of those favoring capital punishment indicated that they would support a mandatory life sentence (i.e., no parole) instead of the death penalty.

* Citizens overwhelmingly felt that the insanity defense should be either modified or abolished. Most believed that persons with mental disorders should be held criminally responsible if treatment was available in state correctional facilities.

* Unemployment replaced cost of living as the most serious community problem. Cost of living was rated second, followed by property tax, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, and property crime.

* Construction of a new maximum security institution was rated as the best alternative to prison overcrowding, followed by regional jails and work camps. It appears that the complexity of the recent Corrections Bond Measure and its lack of emphasis on secure institutional space, along with economic considerations, were factors in the defeat of the measure.

* Most respondents had taken some action during the past year to make their homes more secure. Over half had contacted neighbors about watching each others houses.

* There was no apparent consensus as to whether the parole release decision should be made by the parole board, the sentencing judge, or some other entity. Thirty-one percent thought the sentencing judge should make the final release decision, 29 percent favored the parole board, 21 percent wanted some other process, and 19 percent were undecided.

* There continues to be substantial support for Community Corrections programs when they involve first time violent or property offenders, though support for community programs for first-time adult offenders has declined significantly since 1978. The majority of citizens opposed such programs for individuals convicted of violent sex offenses. There is little support for the involvement of repeat offenders in Community Corrections programs.

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