

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Canadians Want Some Offenders in Alternative Reform Programs

Four-in-five respondents think personal marijuana use should not be punished with a prison term.

[VANCOUVER – Jul. 16, 2008] – Canadians are open to the idea of having some non-violent offenders punished with alternative penalties rather than prison, but reject the scheme being applied to cases of credit card fraud, drunk driving and arson, a new Angus Reid Strategies poll has found.

In the online survey of a representative national sample, seven-in-ten respondents (70%) would like to see the justice system using alternative penalties—such as fines, probation, or community service—rather than jail to punish non-violent offences.

Four-in-five respondents (80%) think that personal marijuana use should not be punished with a jail sentence, but rather with an alternative penalty.

However, most respondents disagree with granting this option to persons convicted for other non-violent offences: 62 per cent of respondents oppose using alternative penalties for credit card fraud; 72 per cent oppose this rationale for drunk driving convictions; and 84 per cent oppose it for arson.

Respondents living in Ontario (74%) are more likely to support the idea of sentencing non-violent offenders through alternative reform programs. Ontarians are also the most inclined to support alternative penalties for personal marijuana use (85% compared to 73% in Alberta, the lowest regional level).

KEY FINDINGS

- **70% support using alternative penalties rather than prison to sentence non-violent offenders**
- **Highest support for this idea is in Ontario (74%)**
- **80% support alternative penalties for personal marijuana use**
- **But less than 40% would agree with giving non-jail sentences to offences such as credit card fraud, drunk driving and arson**

Full topline results are at the end of this release.

From July 2 to July 3, 2008 Angus Reid Strategies conducted an online survey among a randomly selected, representative sample of 1,004 adult Canadians. The margin of error for the total sample is +/- 3.1 %, 19 times out of 20. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region Census data to ensure a sample representative of the entire adult population of Canada. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

Albertans are adamantly opposed to granting alternative penalties to credit card fraud offences (72%), drunk driving (85%) and arson (92%). Conversely, two-in-five respondents in Quebec would support punishing credit-card fraud and drunk driving with sentences other than jail.

Overall support for alternative penalties for non-violent offences is higher among respondents with at least one university degree (78%), those in the middle-income bracket (73%), and those over the age of 55 (74%).

This is the third in a series of four Angus Reid Strategies surveys that look at the way Canadians feel about their justice system.

Justice System							
Broadly speaking, do you support or oppose using alternative penalties—such as fines, probation or community service—rather than prison for non-violent offenders?							
	Region						
	National	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Strongly support	26%	20%	25%	18%	30%	26%	24%
Moderately support	44%	47%	39%	54%	44%	42%	45%
Moderately oppose	11%	19%	13%	11%	12%	6%	15%
Strongly oppose	15%	14%	22%	11%	11%	21%	15%
Not sure	3%	1%	1%	5%	3%	6%	1%
Strongly / Moderately support	70%	67%	64%	72%	74%	68%	69%

Justice System											
Broadly speaking, do you support or oppose using alternative penalties—such as fines, probation or community service—rather than prison for non-violent offenders?											
	Gender		Age			Income			Education		
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$50K	\$50-99K	\$100K+	HS or less	College/ Tech school	Univ+
Strongly support	29%	23%	22%	30%	25%	27%	26%	28%	20%	26%	35%
Moderately support	42%	46%	47%	39%	49%	42%	47%	40%	44%	44%	43%
Moderately oppose	11%	12%	13%	12%	10%	9%	12%	17%	9%	12%	13%
Strongly oppose	16%	14%	12%	17%	16%	17%	15%	13%	23%	13%	7%
Not sure	2%	4%	6%	3%	1%	6%	0%	2%	3%	4%	2%
Strongly / Moderately support	71%	69%	69%	69%	74%	69%	73%	68%	64%	70%	78%

Justice System

For each of the following offences, would you support or oppose using alternative penalties rather than prison? – “Strongly support” and “Moderately support” responses only.

	Region						
	National	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Personal marijuana use	80%	82%	73%	82%	85%	75%	74%
Credit card fraud	38%	33%	27%	42%	37%	43%	37%
Drunk driving	27%	34%	15%	29%	19%	41%	17%
Arson	15%	14%	8%	13%	11%	29%	6%

Justice System

For each of the following offences, would you support or oppose using alternative penalties rather than prison? – “Strongly support” and “Moderately support” responses only.

	Gender		Age			Income			Education		
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$50K	\$50-99K	\$100K+	HS or less	College/ Tech school	Univ+
Personal marijuana use	80%	80%	89%	77%	76%	75%	82%	88%	74%	78%	93%
Credit card fraud	39%	36%	34%	40%	38%	35%	38%	39%	33%	37%	46%
Drunk driving	31%	22%	27%	28%	24%	31%	23%	26%	26%	27%	26%
Arson	16%	15%	16%	15%	15%	17%	15%	13%	18%	14%	15%

Justice System							
For each of the following offences, would you support or oppose using alternative penalties rather than prison? – “Moderately oppose” and “Strongly oppose” responses only.							
	Region						
	National	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Personal marijuana use	18%	16%	27%	13%	13%	21%	26%
Credit card fraud	62%	65%	72%	58%	63%	55%	63%
Drunk driving	72%	65%	85%	71%	80%	58%	79%
Arson	84%	85%	92%	86%	88%	71%	89%

Justice System											
For each of the following offences, would you support or oppose using alternative penalties rather than prison? – “Moderately oppose” and “Strongly oppose” responses only.											
	Gender		Age			Income			Education		
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$50K	\$50-99K	\$100K+	HS or less	College/ Tech school	Univ+
Personal marijuana use	18%	18%	9%	21%	21%	23%	16%	11%	23%	20%	6%
Credit card fraud	60%	63%	65%	60%	61%	64%	61%	60%	66%	63%	53%
Drunk driving	67%	77%	71%	71%	75%	68%	77%	70%	71%	73%	72%
Arson	83%	84%	82%	84%	84%	82%	84%	84%	80%	86%	85%

Angus Reid Strategies is a full-service polling and market research firm which is a leader in the use of the Internet and rich media technology to collect high-quality, in-depth insights for a wide array of clients. Dr. Angus Reid and the Angus Reid Strategies team are pioneers in online research methodologies, and have been conducting online surveys since 1995.

Angus Reid Strategies, along with its sister company, Vision Critical, is now the largest Canadian-owned market research enterprise. In addition to its four offices in Canada—located in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal—the firm also has offices San Francisco, New York and London, England. Its team of specialists provides solutions across every type and sector of research, and currently serves over 200 international clients.

Angus Reid Strategies polls are conducted using the Angus Reid Forum online panel (www.angusreidforum.com), which is recruited via an industry-leading process that incorporates a randomized, widespread invitation approach and a triple opt-in screening procedure. The panel is maintained through state-of-the-art sampling techniques and frequent verifications of personal identity, contact information, and demographic characteristics. This premier online survey platform presents respondents with highly visual, interactive, and engaging surveys, ensuring that panel members provide thoughtful and reliable responses.

Over the last year, Angus Reid has covered five elections in Canada—more than any other pollster in the country—and the results have accurately predicted the outcome of each of these democratic processes. <http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=news&newsid=194>

More information on the way Angus Reid Strategies conducts public opinion research can be found at <http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/uploads/pages/pdfs/ARS.ARF.WP.pdf>

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**For more information, please contact
our spokesperson listed in the footnote.**

**Copies of this poll are available on our website:
www.angusreidstrategies.com**