

G B A O

Youth First Initiative New Jersey Statewide Survey

March 2021

N = 500 New Jersey adults

Conducted February 3-8, 2021 via online web panel

Margin of error = +/- 4.4 percentage points

- New Jersey residents strongly back a youth criminal justice system that focuses on prevention and rehabilitation over punishment and incarceration.
- In a time of massive partisan divides, New Jersey residents across the political spectrum support a range of policies designed to reform the youth justice system that focus on providing more funding for rehabilitation, increasing funding for social workers, addressing racial inequities in the youth justice system, and including families in treatment planning and services.
- An increasing majority of New Jersey residents support closing youth prisons and redirecting funding to community-based rehabilitation programs. There is also strong bipartisan support for Congress providing funding to incentivize states to close youth prisons and repurpose youth prisons for broader community use.
- Support for these policies is based on the belief that most youth in the justice system are capable of positive change, the system should provide them with more opportunities to better themselves, and the best thing for society is to rehabilitate youth offenders so they can become productive members of society.

A golden statue of Lady Justice, the personification of the law, is shown from the chest up. She wears a crown and has her eyes blindfolded. She holds a pair of scales in her raised right hand and a sword in her left hand. The background is a clear, light blue sky. A dark blue banner with white text is overlaid on the lower part of the image.

Prevention & Rehabilitation Vs. Punishment & Incarceration

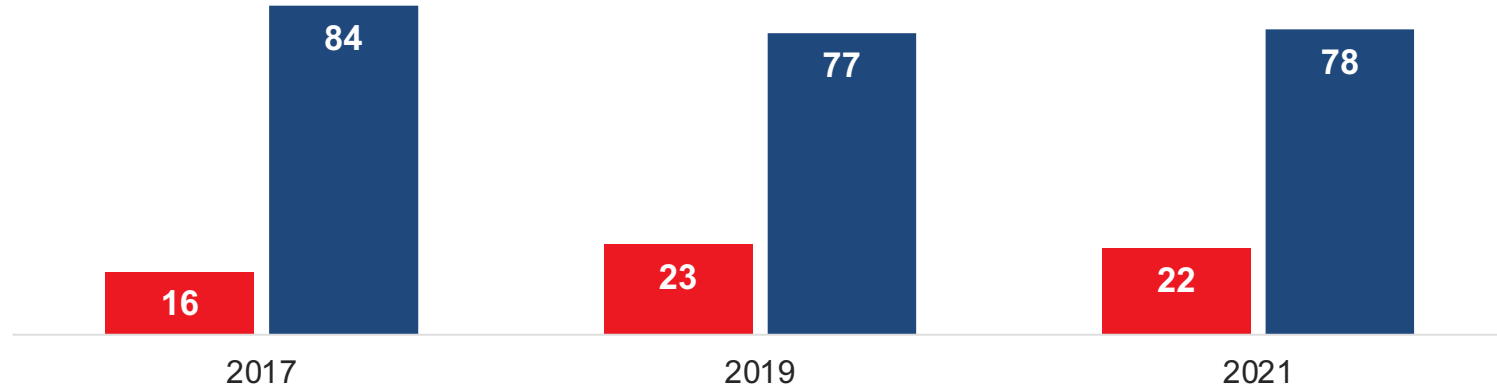
Consistent Preference For Prevention & Rehabilitation Among New Jersey Residents

Figure 4

Punishment Vs. Prevention

Compared to the way things are now in the youth justice system, if you had to choose, do you think there should be more focus on punishment and incarceration or more focus on prevention and rehabilitation?

● Punishment and incarceration ● Prevention and rehabilitation



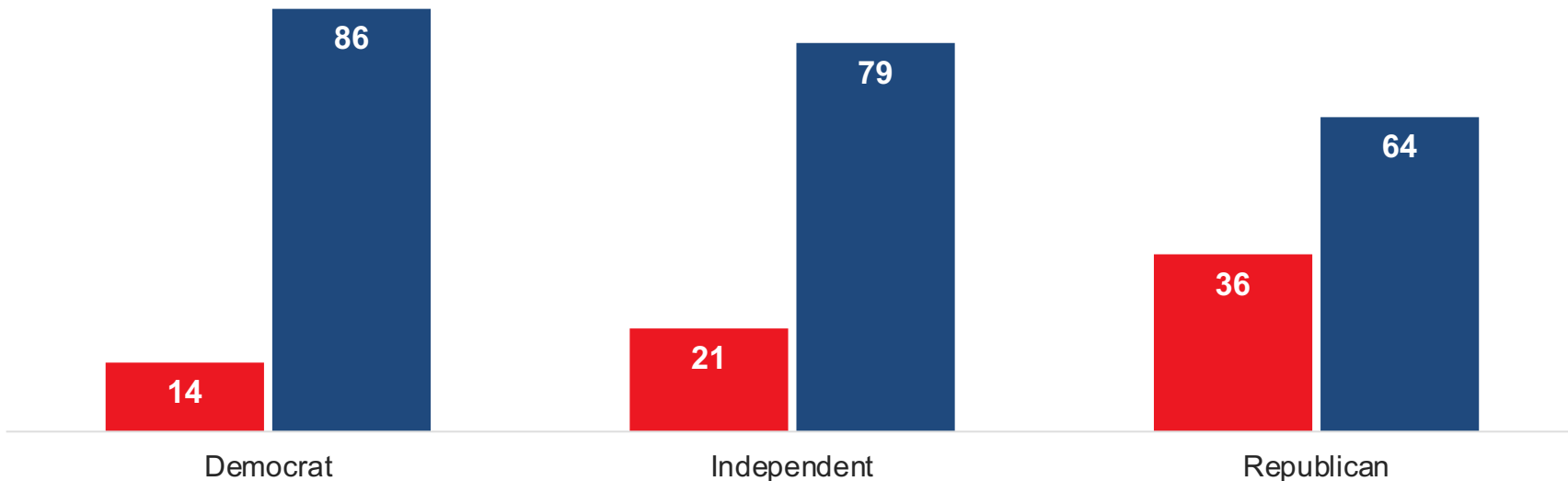
Strong Support Across Party Lines For Prevention & Rehabilitation

Figure 5

Punishment Vs. Prevention

Compared to the way things are now in the youth justice system, if you had to choose, do you think there should be more focus on punishment and incarceration or more focus on prevention and rehabilitation?

● Punishment and incarceration ● Prevention and rehabilitation



A top-down view of a wooden desk with a white notebook, a silver ruler, and pens. The notebook has a line graph on it. A dark blue banner is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

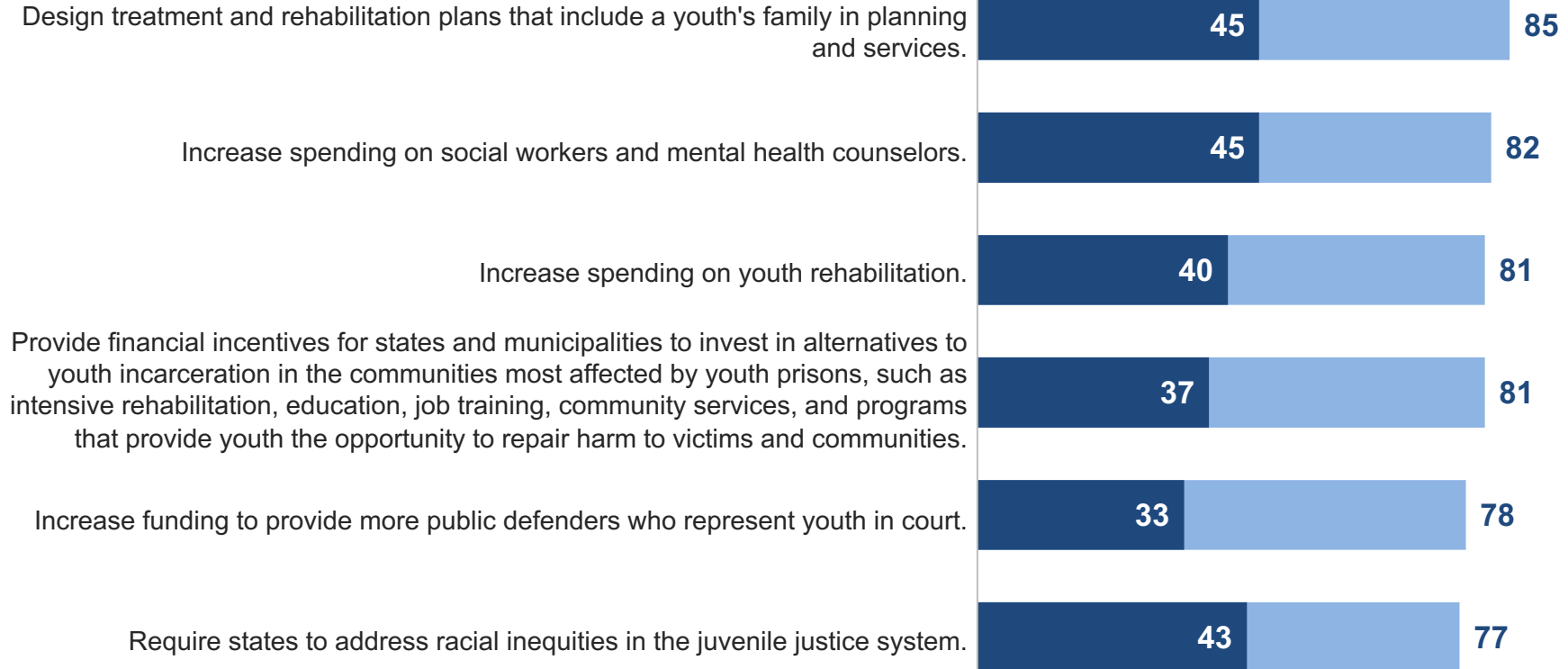
Policies

New Jersey Residents Back A Range Of Youth Justice Reform Proposals

Figure 7

Youth Justice Reform Proposals

● Strongly favor ● Total favor

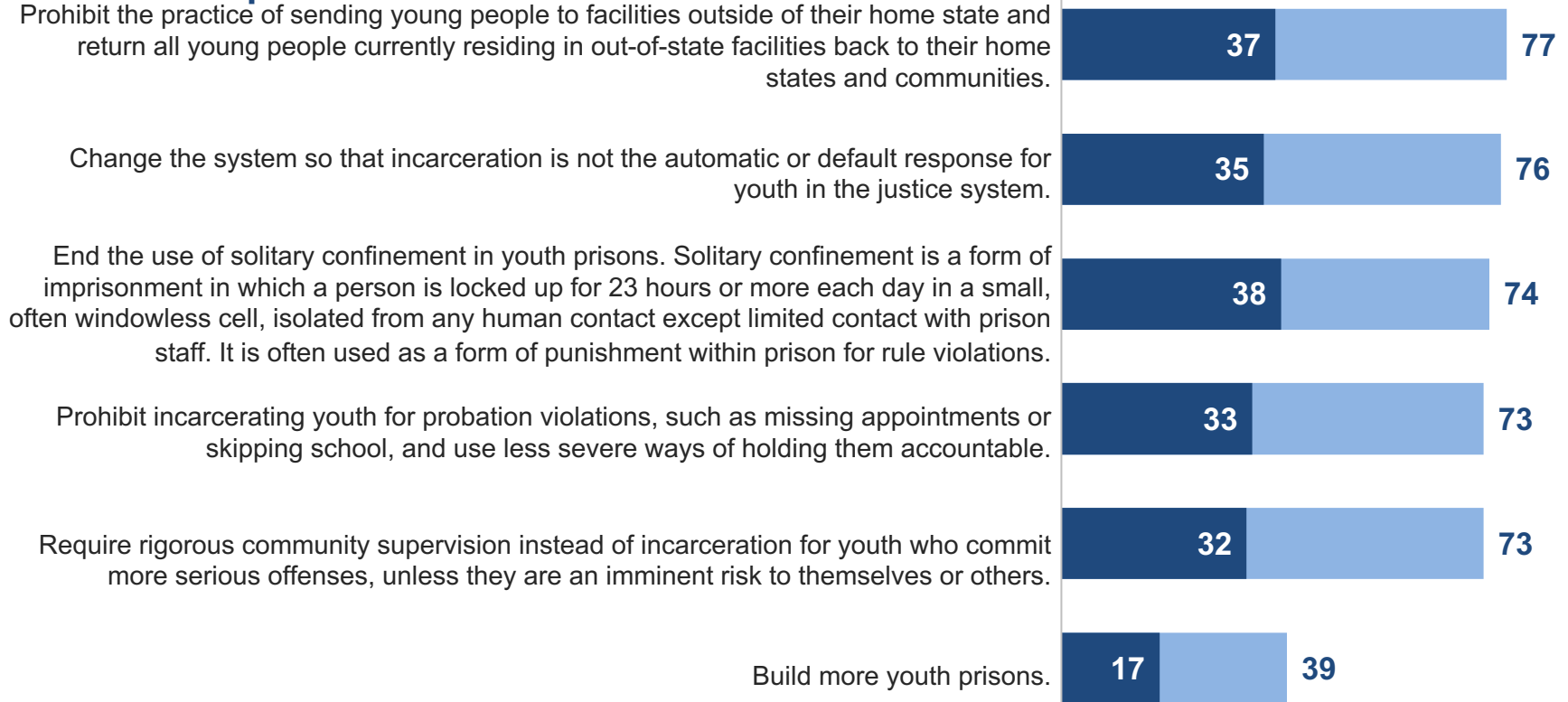


Only Proposal Without Majority Support Is Building More Youth Prisons

Figure 8

Youth Justice Reform Proposals

● Strongly favor ● Total favor



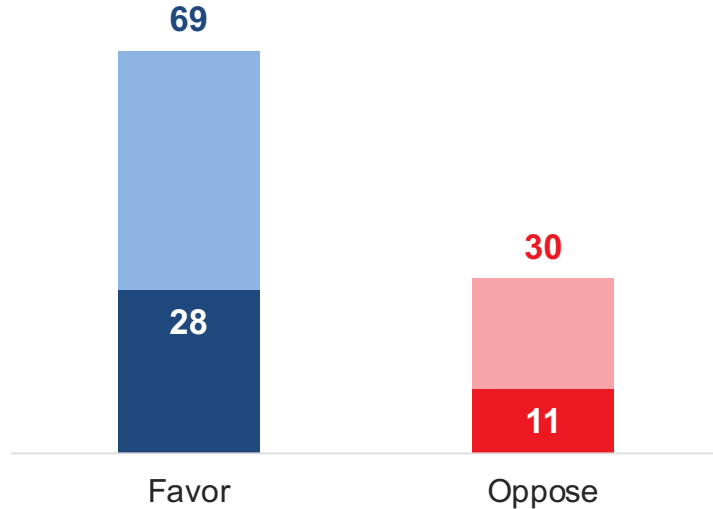
Majority Support For Closing Youth Prisons, Especially For-Profit Prisons

Figure 9

Close Youth Prisons

Close youth prisons and redirect the savings to community-based rehabilitation programs.

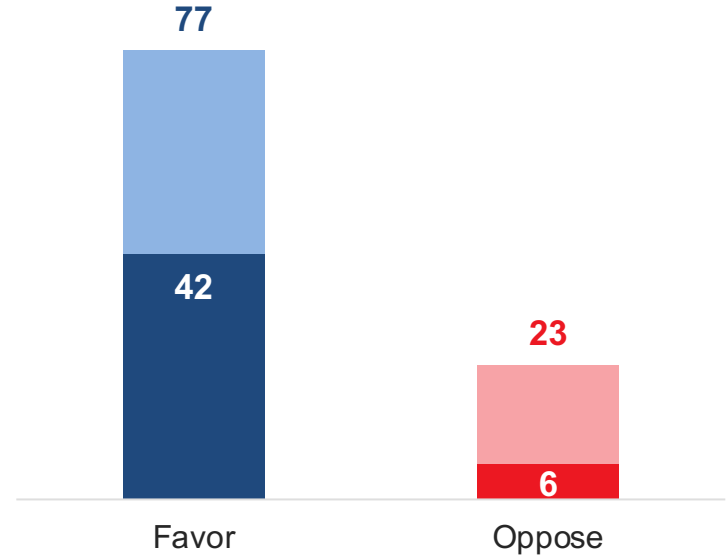
Darker shade = Stronger intensity



Close For-Profit Youth Prisons

Close for-profit youth prisons and confinement centers and redirect the savings to community-based rehabilitation programs.

Darker shade = Stronger intensity

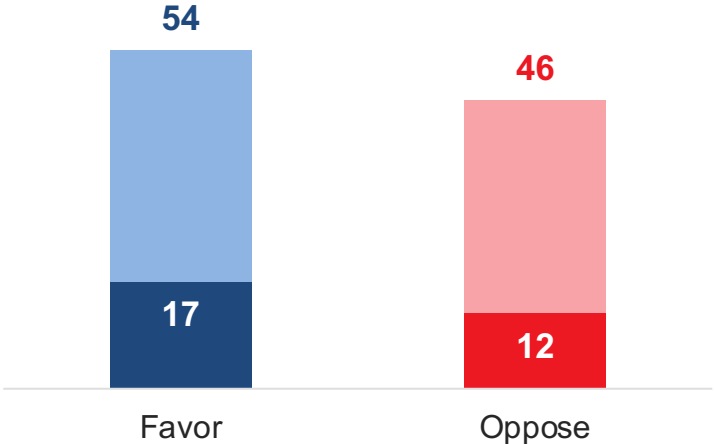


Support Is Rising For Closing Youth Prisons

March 2019

Close youth prisons and redirect the savings to community-based rehabilitation programs.

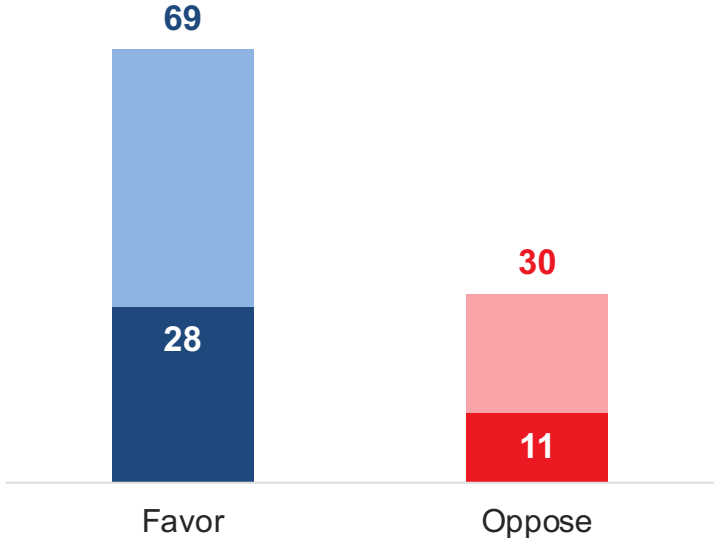
Darker shade = Stronger intensity



February 2021

Close youth prisons and redirect the savings to community-based rehabilitation programs.

Darker shade = Stronger intensity

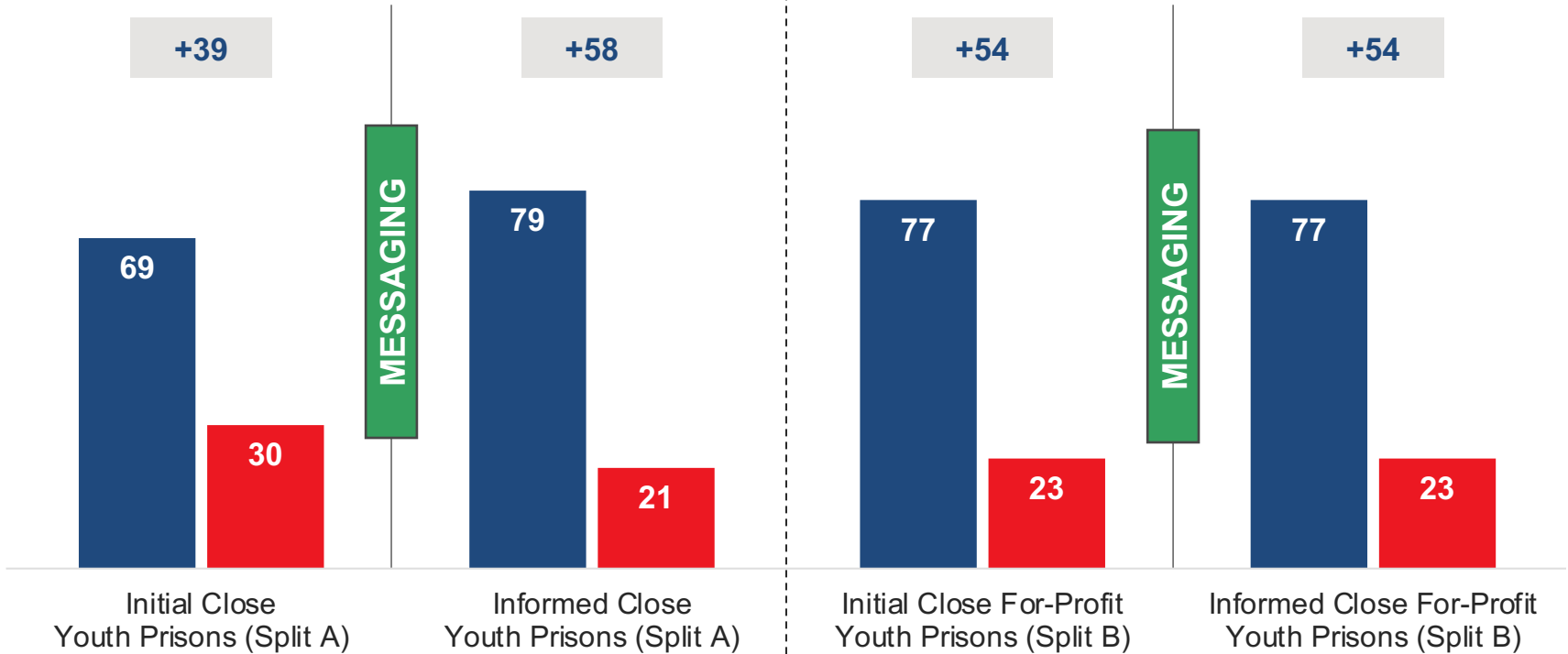


Support For Closing Youth Prisons Remains Strong After Hearing Supporter Messaging

Figure 11

Prison Closing Progression

● Favor ● Oppose



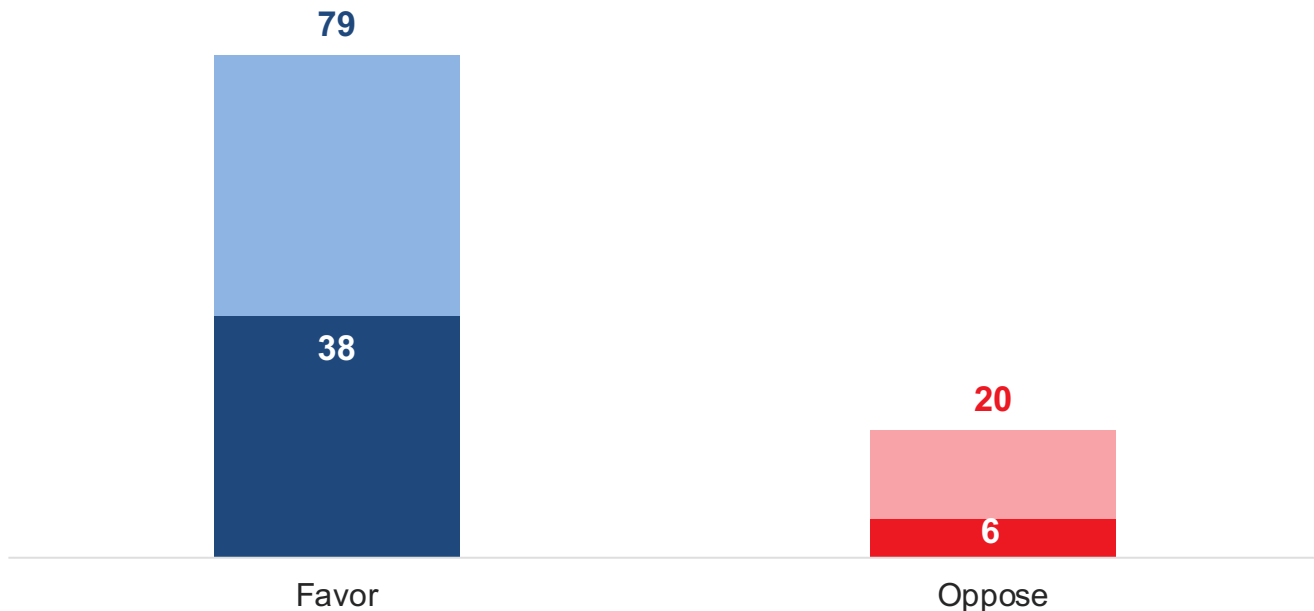
New Jersey Residents Overwhelmingly Back Grants For Alternatives To Youth Prisons

Figure 12

Federal Grant Program

Darker shade = Stronger intensity

Do you favor or oppose a proposal for the federal government to create a new grant program that encourages states to place youth in community-based alternatives to prison and that repurposes youth prisons for community use and not incarceration?

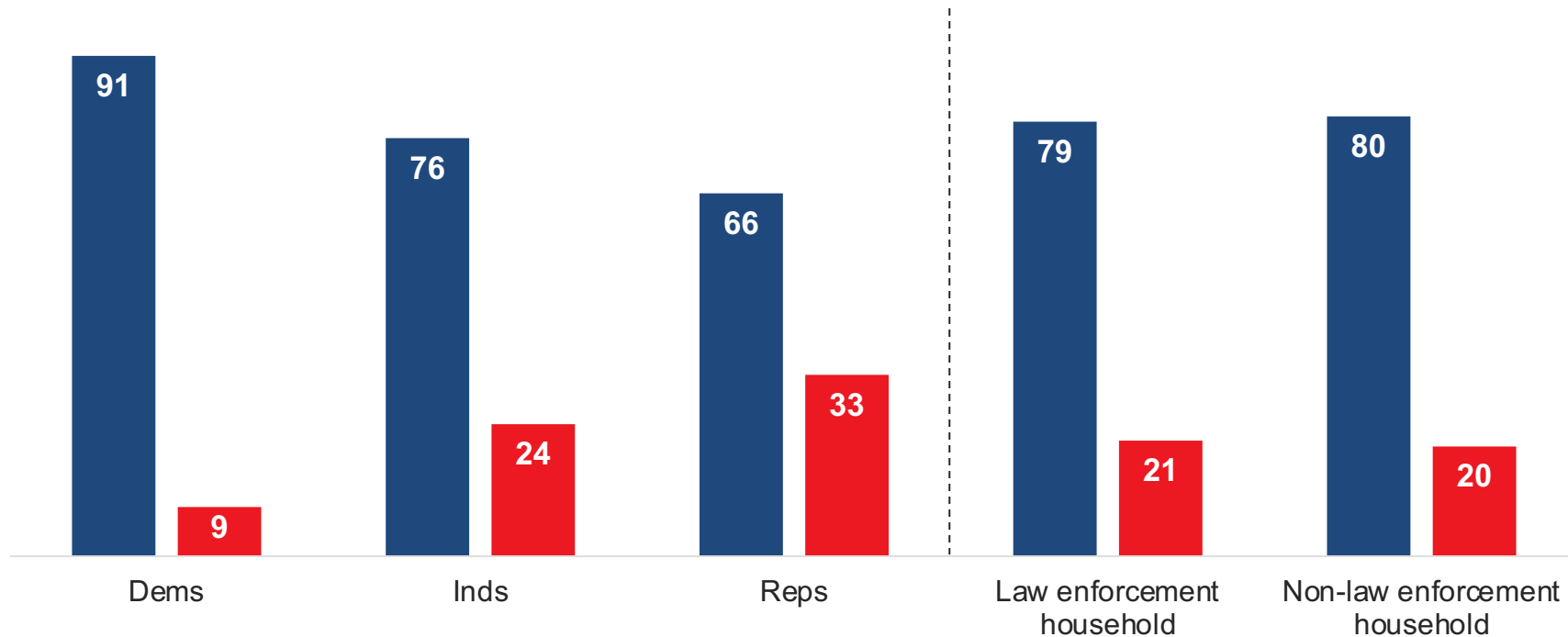


Strong Support Across Party Lines And Among Law Enforcement Households

Figure 13

Federal Grant Program

● Favor ● Oppose

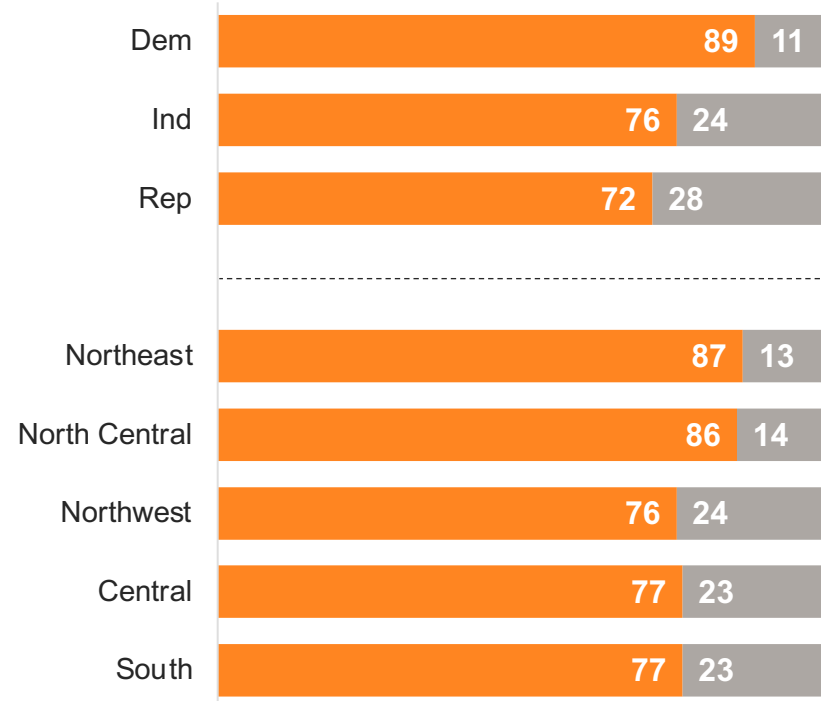
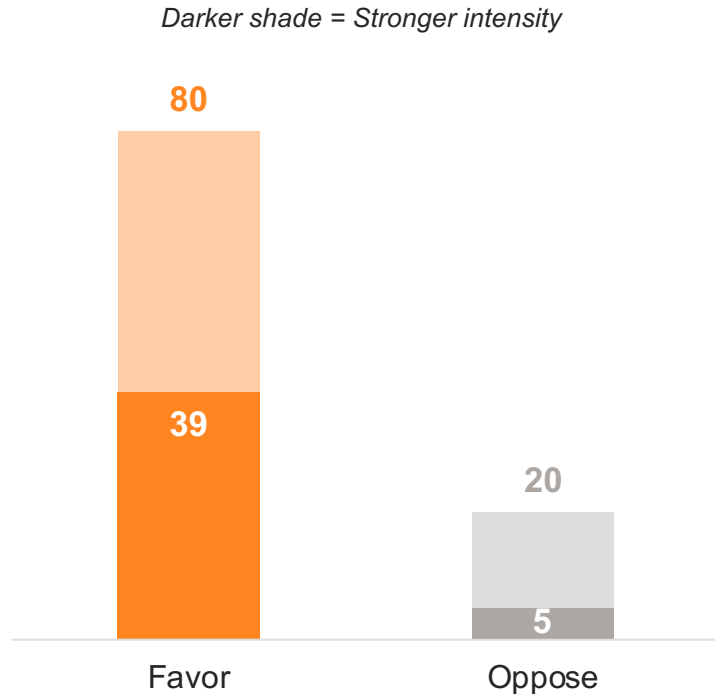


Strong Support Across The Board For Congress Incentivizing States To Shift Away From Youth Incarceration

Figure 14

Financial Incentives

Do you favor or oppose the U.S. Congress providing financial incentives to states and localities that shift investments away from youth incarceration and towards community services for youth?

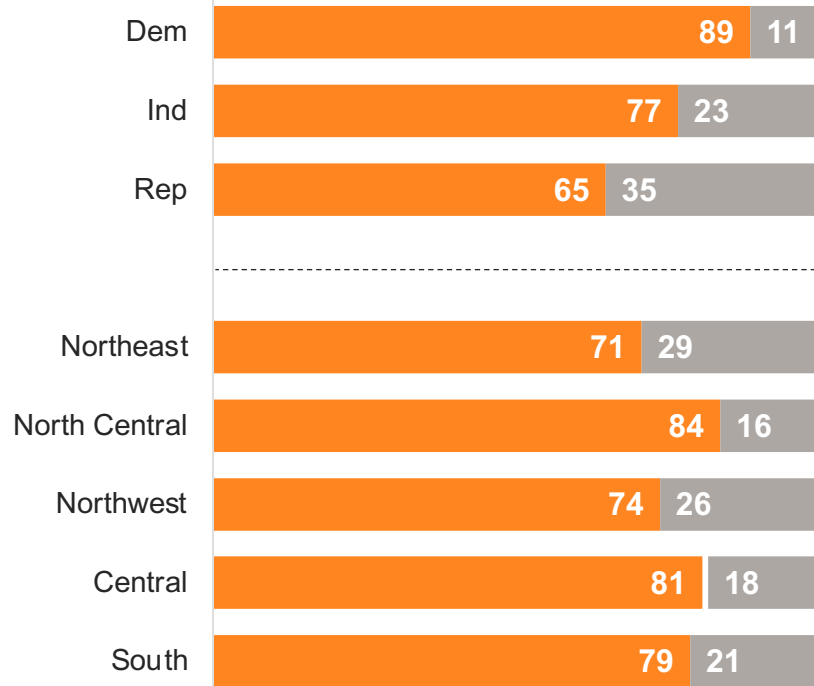
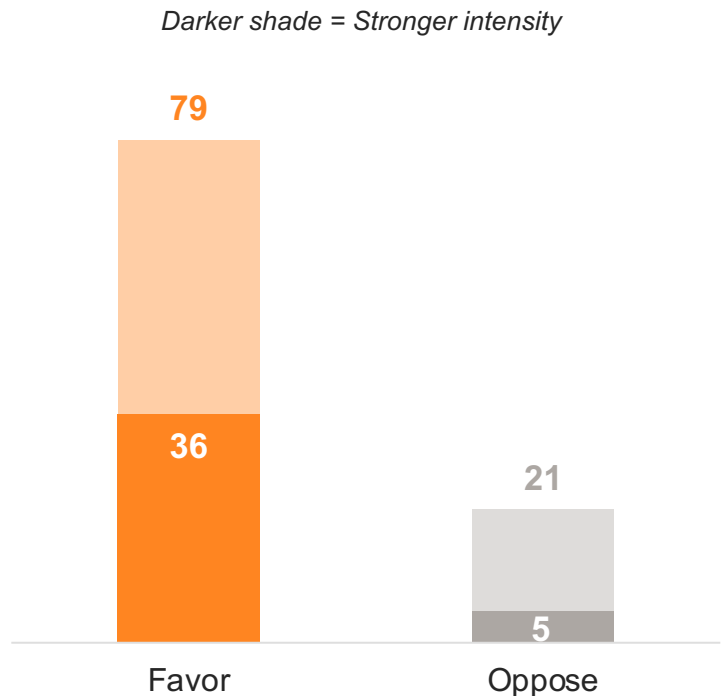


New Jersey Residents Strongly Back Funding For Displaced Youth Prison Workers Due To Closures

Figure 15

Funding For Displaced Workers

Do you favor or oppose Congress providing funding to states to help workers who lose their jobs because of youth prison closures to get new jobs and help shift local economies away from reliance on youth prisons?

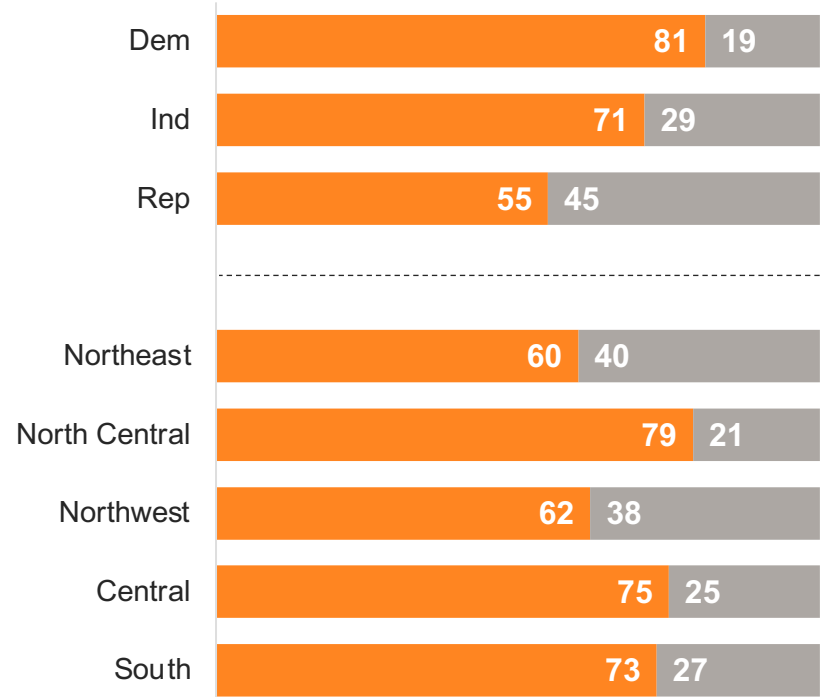
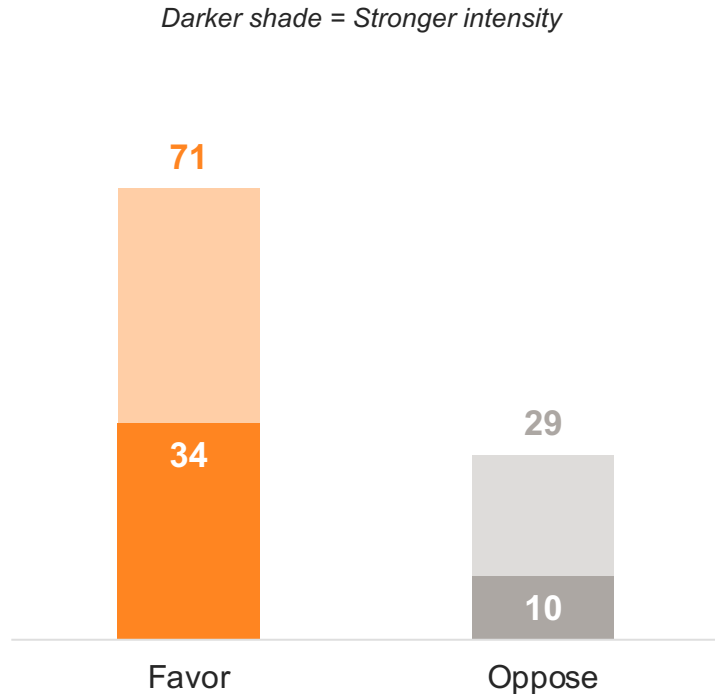


New Jersey Residents Strongly Support Releasing Youth To Help Slow Spread Of COVID-19 In Youth Prisons

Figure 16

Early Release To Stop COVID-19 Spread

In order to reduce the spread of coronavirus in youth prisons, do you favor or oppose the early release of youth in prisons who are not considered to be a serious threat to public safety?





Messaging

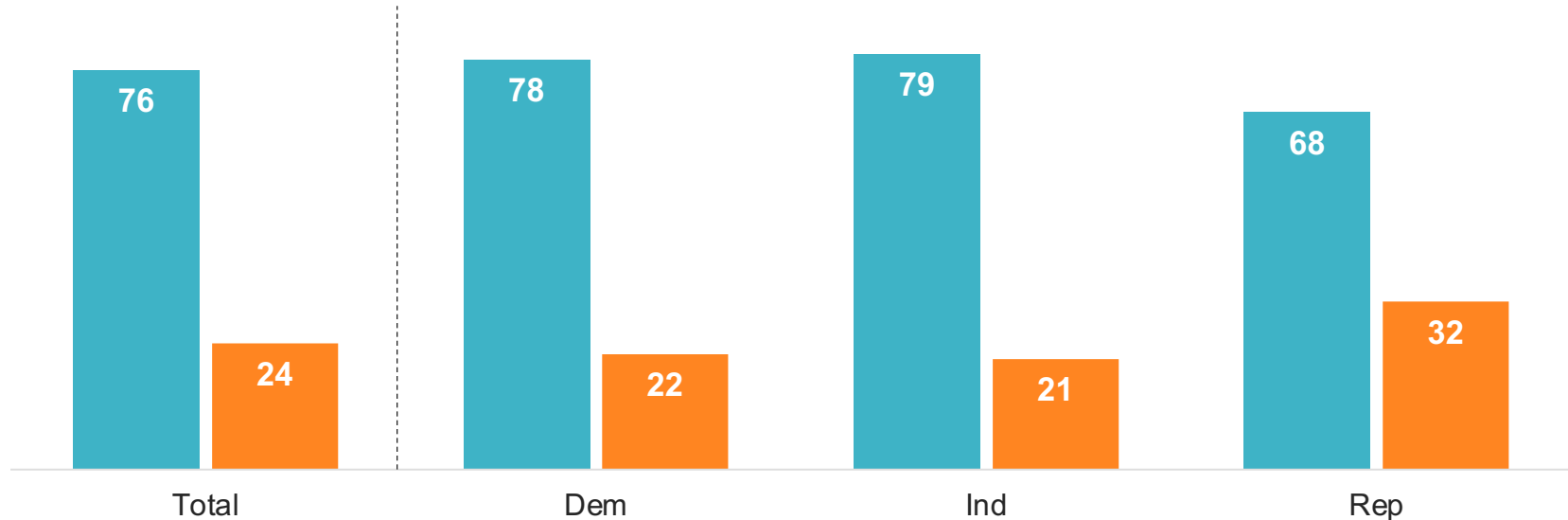
Strong Support Among New Jersey Residents For Rehabilitation Over Incarceration

Figure 18

Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

● When it comes to youth who are in the juvenile justice system, **the best thing for society is to rehabilitate them** so they can become productive members of society.

● When it comes to youth who are in the juvenile justice system, **the best thing for society is to incarcerate them** to take them off of the streets.



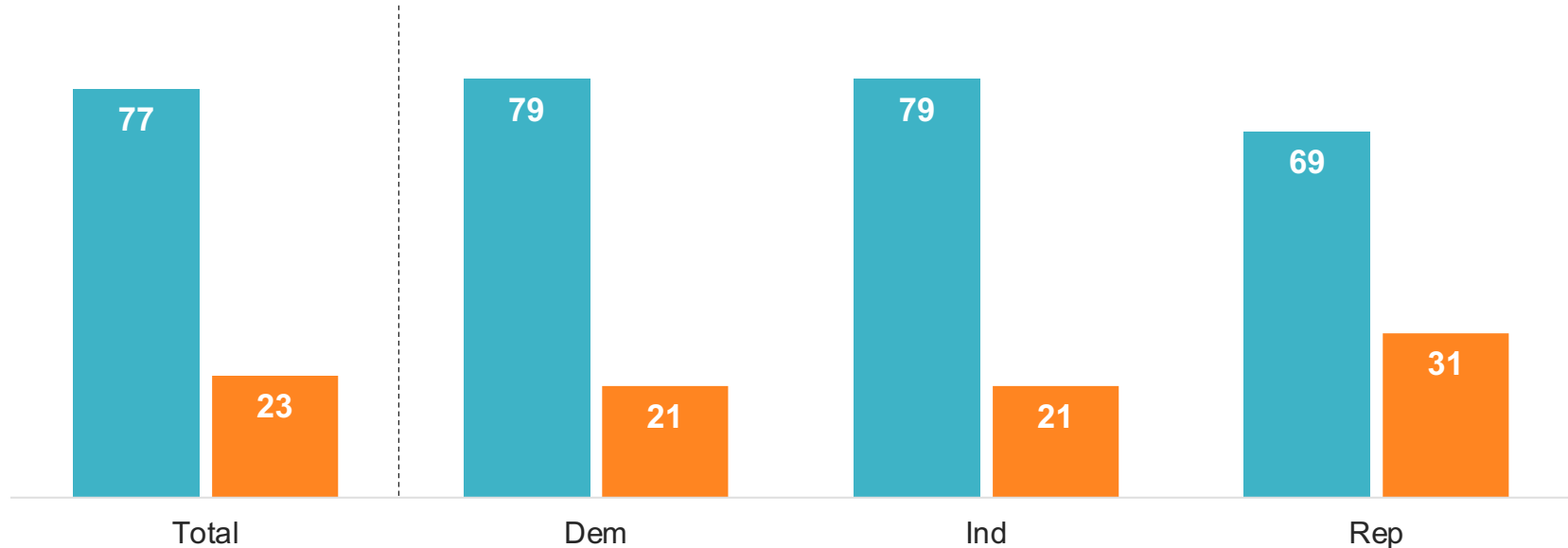
Strong Support Among New Jersey Residents For Giving Youth The Opportunity To Better Themselves

Figure 19

Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

● The youth justice system should provide youth with more **opportunity to better themselves**.

● The youth justice system should focus on **punishing youth** who have committed delinquent acts.



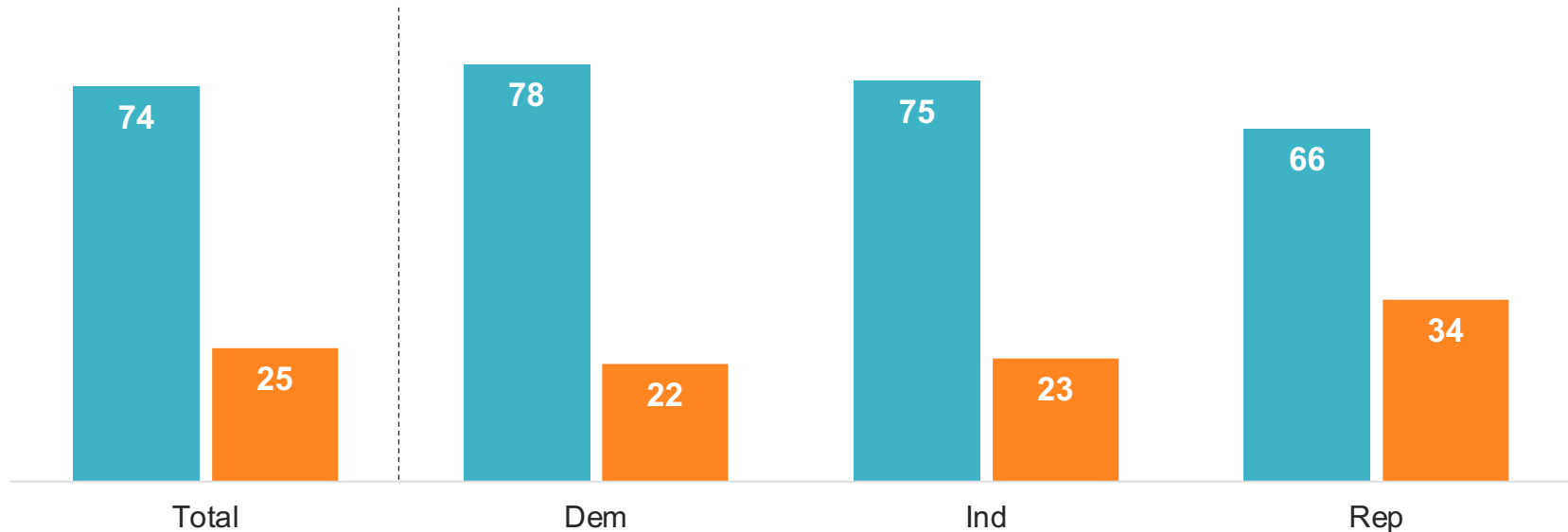
New Jersey Residents Overwhelming Believe Youth Can Change

Figure 20

Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

● Most youth who are in the juvenile justice system are capable of **positive growth**, and they have the potential to change for the better.

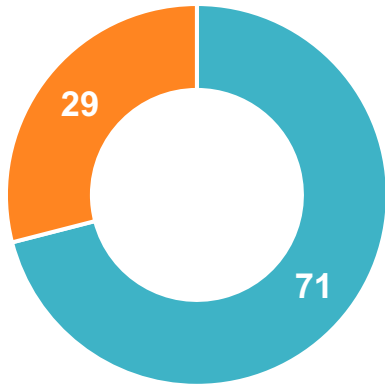
● Most youth who are in the juvenile justice system are **unlikely to change** for the better, and they will likely continue a life of illegal behavior.



New Jersey Residents Overwhelmingly Believe Rehabilitation Saves Money And Prevents Future Delinquent Acts

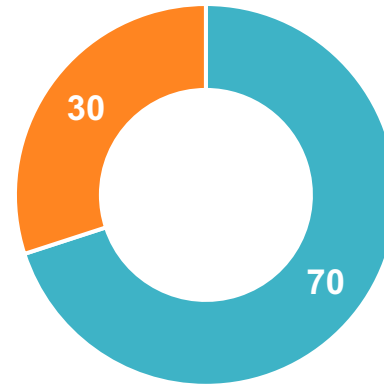
Figure 21

Save Vs. Cost Taxpayer Dollars



- Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education for youth who are in the juvenile justice system will **SAVE tax dollars** in the long run.
- Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education for youth who are in the juvenile justice system will **COST tax dollars** in the long run.

Prevent Vs. Not Prevent Future Delinquent Acts



- Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education for youth who are in the juvenile justice system help **prevent future delinquent acts**.
- **Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education do little to prevent** youth who are in the juvenile justice system from re-entering the juvenile justice system.

Top-Tier Positive Messages Involve Getting Kids Back On Track, Accountability, And Offering A Range Of Community-Based Programs

Figure 22

Youth Justice Positives

Rate each statement on a scale of 0 to 10, where a 10 means you think it is a very convincing reason to close youth prisons, and a 0 means you do not consider it to be a convincing reason at all to close youth prisons.

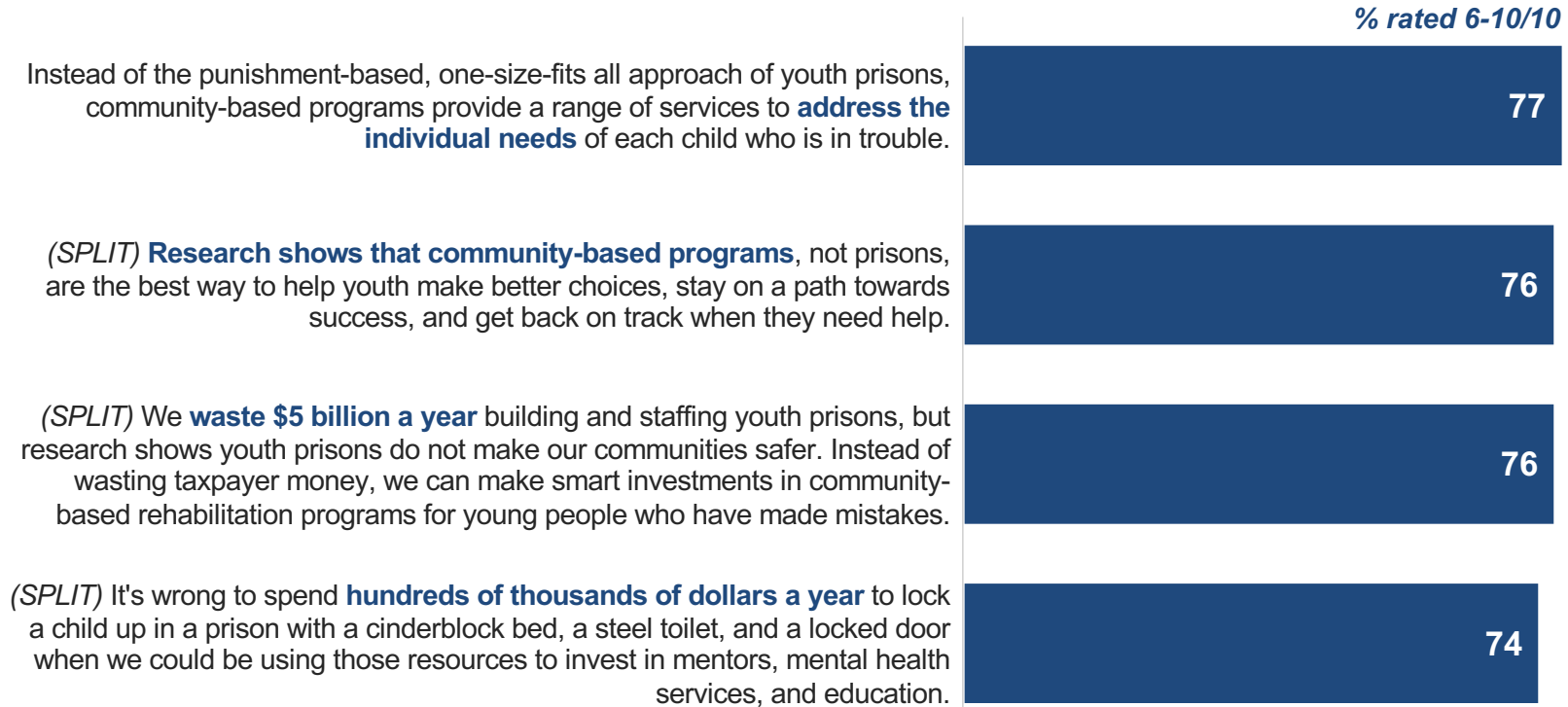


Additional Effective Messages Include Wasting Money On Mass Incarceration & Getting Rid of One-Size-Fits All Approaches

Figure 23

Youth Justice Positives

Rate each statement on a scale of 0 to 10, where a 10 means you think it is a very convincing reason to close youth prisons, and a 0 means you do not consider it to be a convincing reason at all to close youth prisons.

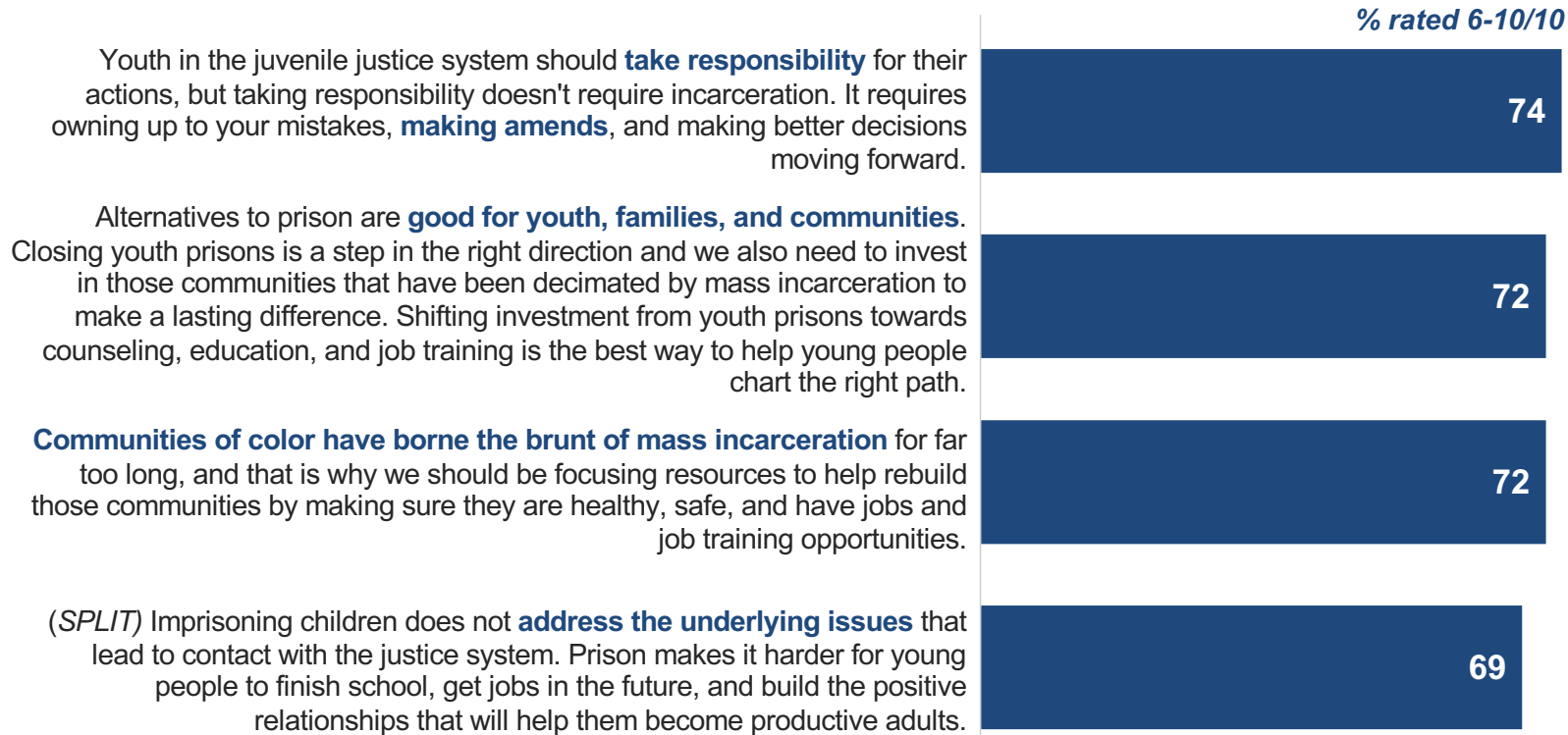


Additional Effective Messages Involve Taking Responsibility And Focusing On Communities Bearing Brunt of Mass Incarceration

Figure 24

Youth Justice Positives

Rate each statement on a scale of 0 to 10, where a 10 means you think it is a very convincing reason to close youth prisons, and a 0 means you do not consider it to be a convincing reason at all to close youth prisons.



G B A O

RESEARCH + STRATEGY