



# Survey on Drug Abuse and Drug Policy Summary of Results

**September, 2001**

Conducted by:  
Ridder/Braden, Inc.



# Methodology

This survey was conducted by Ridder/Braden, Inc. and was commissioned by the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition with funding provided by the Lindesmith Center – Drug Policy Foundation. The objective of this study was to measure voter attitudes and opinions toward issues relating to drug abuse and drug policy in Colorado.

## *The Interview*

Respondents were interviewed by telephone. Interviews were conducted between July 25<sup>th</sup> and July 30<sup>th</sup> of 2001.

The telephone interviewers were professionals independently hired by Ridder/Braden to ensure the complete integrity of the survey.

## *Sample*

A random sample of 500 voters were drawn from the list of registered voters in the state of Colorado. In order to capture the attitudes and opinions of active voters, only those who said that they were absolutely certain, very likely, or would possibly vote in the 2002 elections were included in this survey. Those voters who responded that they were not very likely or not at all likely to vote were excluded from the sample.

## *Sample Bias*

Every survey contains some respondents who will refuse to speak to the professional interviewer. A lower response rate among certain types of individuals can result in a sample wherein certain types of individuals are over-represented or under-represented. The potential for sampling bias increases as the response rate decreases. Ridder/Braden, Inc. often sets quotas for various segments of the population which are historically under-counted. This effort should minimize, but not necessarily eliminate sampling bias.

## *Margin of Error*

A sample size of 501 at a 95% confidence level provides a maximum margin of error of approximately plus or minus 4.38%. This means that in 95 of 100 cases, the results based on a sample of 501 will differ by no more than 4.38 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing active voters in Colorado.

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(303) 444-6981

Copies of this report are available at: [www.ccjrc.org](http://www.ccjrc.org)



## Key Findings

### **Colorado Voters Believe “We are Losing the War on Drugs.”**

- 83% of Colorado voters believe that we are losing the war on drugs. The majority of voters believe the war on drugs has been ineffective in reducing drug use and supply in Colorado. These results were consistent across all demographic categories.
- 88% of voters believe that we will never be able to stop drugs from coming into this country until demand is reduced. A similarly high 85% believe that the current war on drugs is dealing with symptoms of drug abuse but failing to solve the underlying causes.
- These results were consistent across all demographic categories.

### **Colorado Voters View Addiction More as a Health Problem than a Crime**

- A clear majority (59%) of voters view addiction primarily as a health problem. Only 11% view drug addiction primarily as a crime. Another 16% responded “both.”

### **Colorado Voters Believe Treatment is an Effective Solution and Support Increasing Funding**

- 86% of voters believe that providing treatment and education to people with a drug problem would be effective in reducing drug use. 80% of voters also believe that providing effective treatment would help reduce drug related crime.
- 74% of voters support increasing funding to expand the availability of drug treatment. The results were consistent across all demographic categories.
- Voters believe that State funding is currently too heavily weighted towards criminal justice, and over three-quarters (77%) favored increasing the amount spent on education, prevention, and treatment. Only 12% thought the current ratio was appropriate and even fewer voters (5%) favored increasing the percentage spent on criminal justice.



## **Colorado Voters Favor Reducing Sentences for Drug Possession**

- Voters were asked what they thought the sentence should be for someone convicted of possession of small quantities of drugs. 60% said treatment and supervision was an appropriate sentence, while 21% favored incarceration.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of voters believe that we should decrease criminal penalties for possession of small quantities of drugs from a felony to a misdemeanor and spend the money saved on prison costs to increase drug treatment and prevention programs. A majority of voters in every demographic category favored the reduction in criminal penalties.
- A strong majority (85%) of voters agree that a person convicted of possession should be allowed to remain in the community under supervision, like an alcoholic, so long as they do not commit other crimes.

## **Colorado Voters Rank Prison Expansion Low on Funding Priorities**

- There is very little support from voters to decrease funding for education, state colleges and universities, roads and highways and public health programs to fund prison expansion.

## **Conclusion**

- Colorado voters clearly view the current war on drugs as a failure and view addiction as primarily a health problem, not a crime. Voters are also strongly supportive of increasing the emphasis on funding for treatment and prevention as well as decreasing sentences for drug possession. Voters believe these reforms would be effective in reducing both drug use and drug related crime in Colorado.

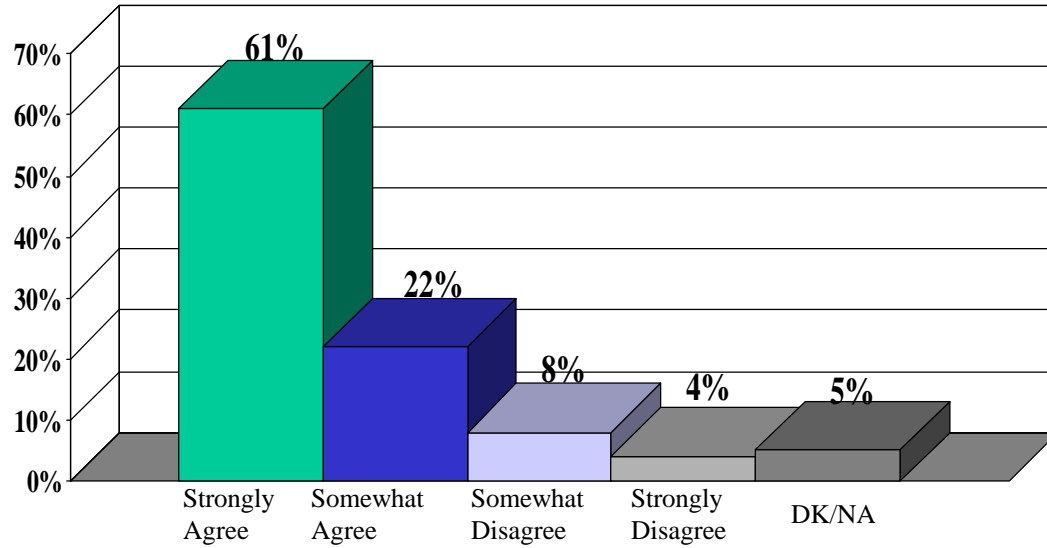


Voter Response to Specific Questions  
on the  
Effectiveness of the War on Drugs



**Voters were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: “We are losing the war on drugs.”**

83% either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement. These results are consistent across all demographic categories.



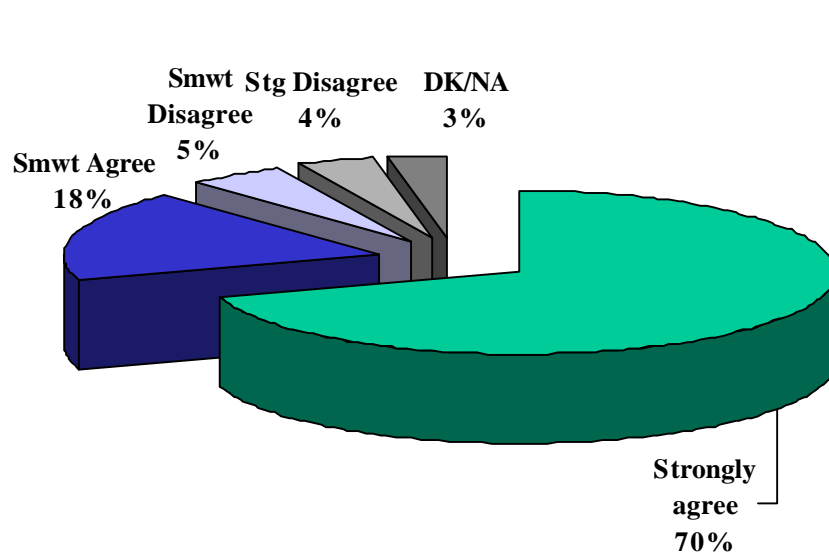
	Gender		Age					Party Affiliation			Type of Community			Ethnicity				
	Male	Female	18-34	35-45	46-55	56-64	65+	Dem	Rep	Unaff.	Urban	SubRural/urban	Rural/town	Caucasian	Black	Latino	Other	
<b>Total</b>																		
Base 500	239	262	84	116	125	69	100	170	191	139	139	214	140	405	23	53	19	
	48%	52%	17%	23%	25%	14%	20%	34%	38%	28%	28%	43%	28%	81%	5%	11%	4%	
Strongly Agree	61%	60%	62%	51%	57%	62%	80%	61%	64%	64%	54%	62%	61%	62%	64%	50%	43%	56%
Somewhat Agree	22	22	22	29	21	21	13	23	21	21	24	20	24	20	21	13	35	23
Somewhat Disagree	8	8	8	8	16	6	3	4	6	8	10	9	6	10	7	13	14	9
Strongly Disagree	4	5	3	3	3	7	0	5	5	3	5	1	5	4	3	25	3	9
DK/NA	5	5	8	3	4	3	7	3	4	6	8	3	4	5	0	5	4	



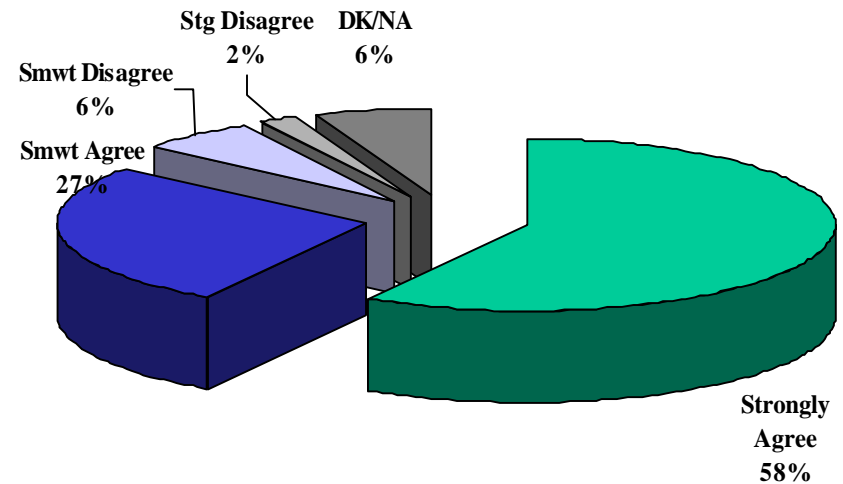
**Voters were asked to agree or disagree with the following statements:**

*“We will never be able to stop drugs from coming into this country until demand is reduced.”*

*“The current “war on drugs” is dealing with symptoms of drug abuse but failing to solve underlying causes.”*



88% strongly or somewhat agree that we will never stop the flow of drugs into this country until demand is reduced.



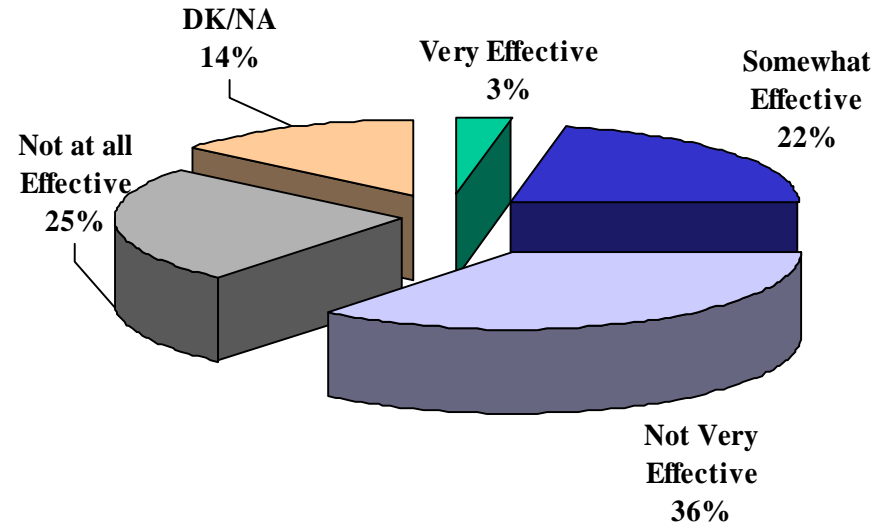
85% strongly or somewhat agree that the current war on drugs is failing to solve the underlying causes of drug abuse.





**Voters were asked:** “How effective has the war on drugs been in reducing drug supply in Colorado?”

61% of voters believe that the war on drugs has been ineffective in reducing the supply of drugs. Only 3% believe it has been very effective and another 22% believe it has been somewhat effective.



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<b>Total</b>																		
Base 500	239	262	84	116	125	69	100	170	191	139	139	214	140	405	23	53	19	
	48%	52%	17%	23%	25%	14%	20%	34%	38%	28%	28%	43%	28%	81%	5%	11%	4%	
Very effective	3%	2%	4%	4%	2%	3%	5%	3%	4%	2%	2%	2%	4%	3%	2%	0%	11%	0%
Somewhat effective	22	25	18	20	23	21	21	23	21	23	20	22	21	22	19	38	30	23
Not very effective	36	38	34	41	36	33	35	34	34	38	36	34	33	41	37	25	35	37
Not at all effective	25	24	27	19	23	33	26	24	28	20	29	26	27	22	27	25	19	14
DK/NA/Refused	14	11	17	16	16	11	14	16	12	17	13	15	14	12	15	13	5	26

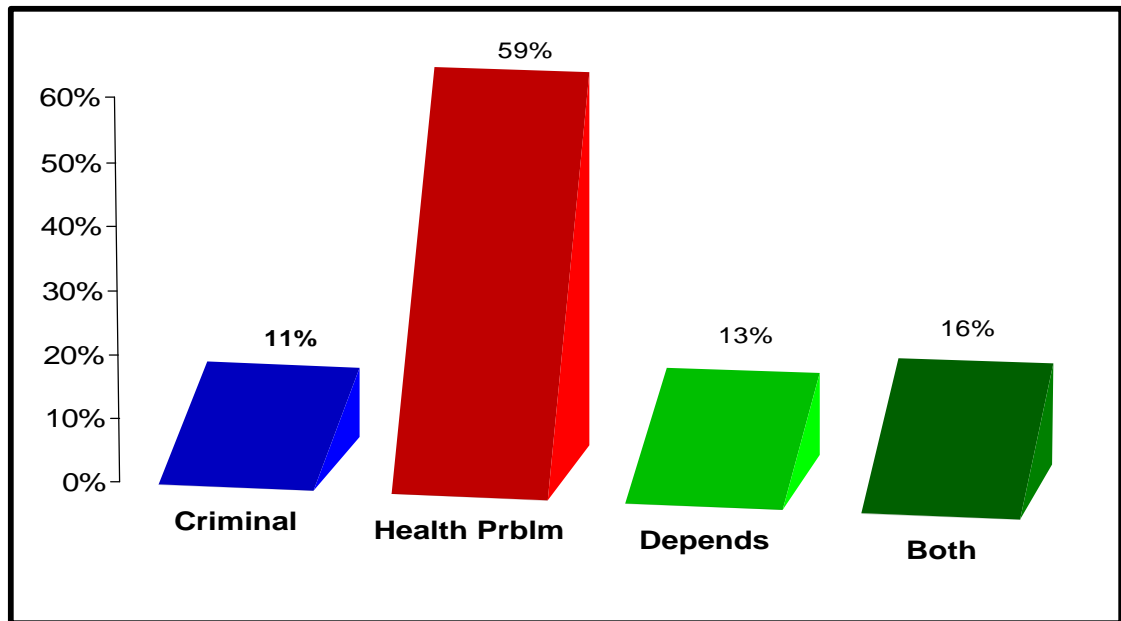


# Voters General Perceptions on Drug Addiction



**Voters were asked:** *“In general, do you view a person with a drug problem as a criminal who should be punished by being sent to prison or as someone with a health problem who should receive treatment?”*

Nearly 60% of those surveyed view drug addiction primarily as a health problem. Only 11% view drug addiction primarily as a crime. 16% volunteered “both.”



	Gender		Age					Party Affiliation			Type of Community			Ethnicity				
	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-45	46-55	56-64	65+	Dem	Rep	Unaff.	Urban	Sub urban	Rural/ town	Caucasian	Black	Latino	Other
Base	500	239	262	84	116	125	69	100	170	191	139	139	214	140	405	23	53	19
		48%	52%	17%	23%	25%	14%	20%	34%	38%	28%	28%	43%	28%	81%	5%	11%	4%
Criminal/punishment	11%	11%	11%	7%	14%	17%	7%	7%	7%	15%	11%	11%	11%	11%	11%	25%	8%	12%
Health problem/treatment	59	54	63	68	59	49	63	60	70	45	64	57	58	61	58	63	68	58
Both	16	19	12	15	16	19	16	10	11	23	11	14	17	16	17	0	14	11
Depends	13	12	13	8	8	14	12	21	11	15	10	16	12	10	13	13	11	19
DK/NA	2	3	1	1	3	1	3	2	1	2	3	2	1	3	2	0	0	0

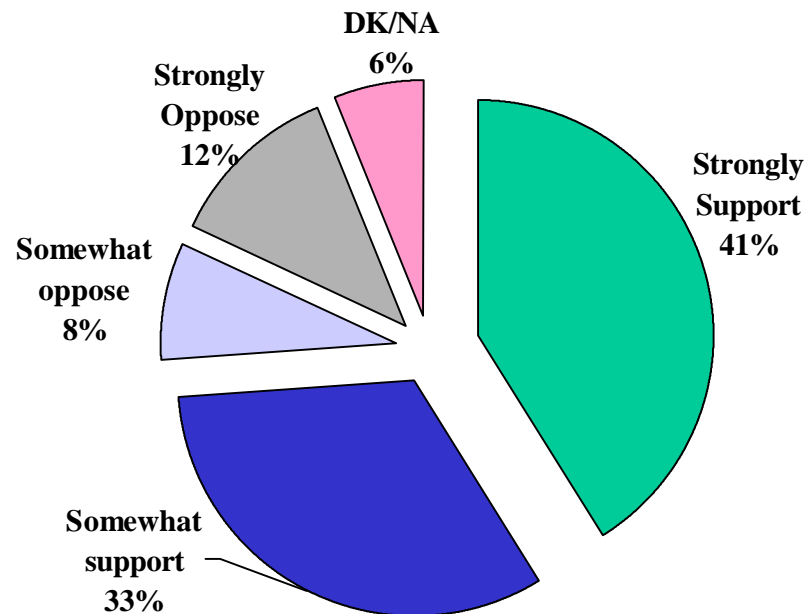


Voter Opinion on the Effectiveness  
of Treatment and Level of Support  
for Increasing Funding for Treatment



**Voters were asked:** “In Colorado, publicly funded treatment is available for approximately 20% of those who need it. Would you support or oppose increasing state funding to greatly expand the availability of treatment for people with a drug problem?”

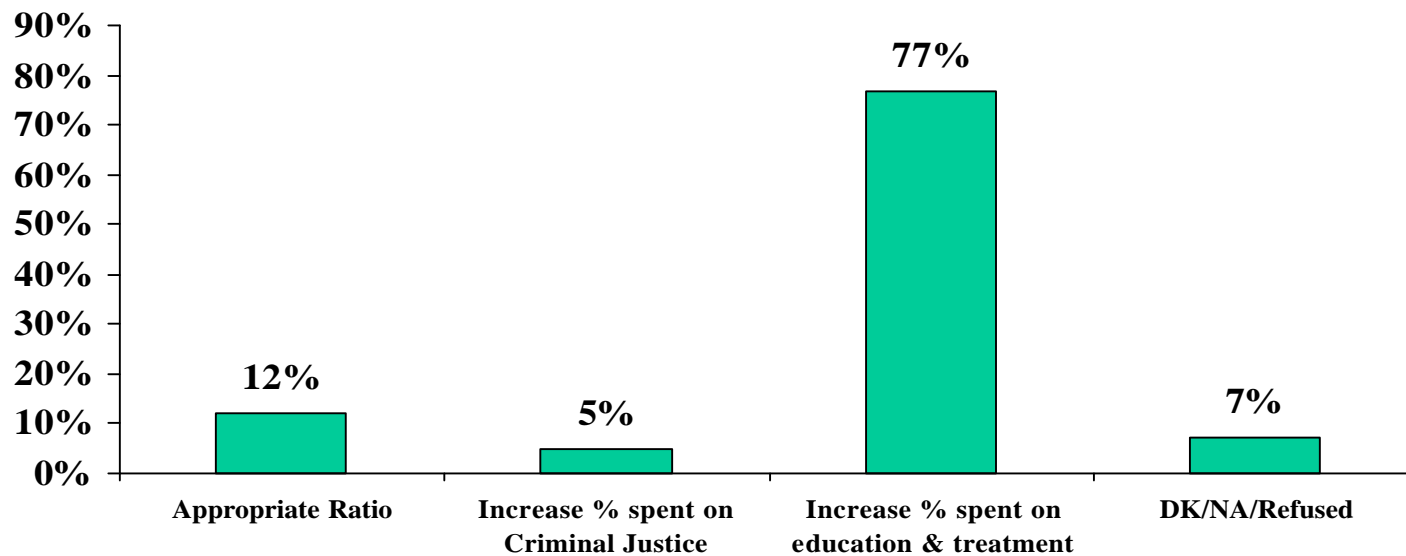
Nearly three-fourth’s (74%) of Colorado voters support increasing funding to greatly expand treatment programs. The support is consistently high, as at least two-third’s of the voters in every demographic category support increasing funding for treatment



	Gender		Age					Party Affiliation			Type of Community			Ethnicity				
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Base 500	239	262	84	116	125	69	100	170	191	139	139	214	140	405	23	53	19	
	48%	52%	17%	23%	25%	14%	20%	34%	38%	28%	28%	43%	28%	81%	5%	11%	4%	
Strongly support	41%	40%	41%	52%	34%	47%	46%	28%	52%	29%	42%	44%	43%	35%	39%	50%	54%	37%
Somewhat Support	33	30	35	30	36	29	33	38	26	37	37	33	32	35	34	25	24	47
Somewhat Oppose	8	10	7	6	10	10	3	9	7	10	7	7	6	11	9	0	8	9
Strongly Oppose	12	14	10	7	15	10	12	17	9	17	9	9	12	15	13	25	8	0
DK/NA/Refused	6	5	7	5	5	5	6	8	6	7	6	7	7	4	6	0	5	7



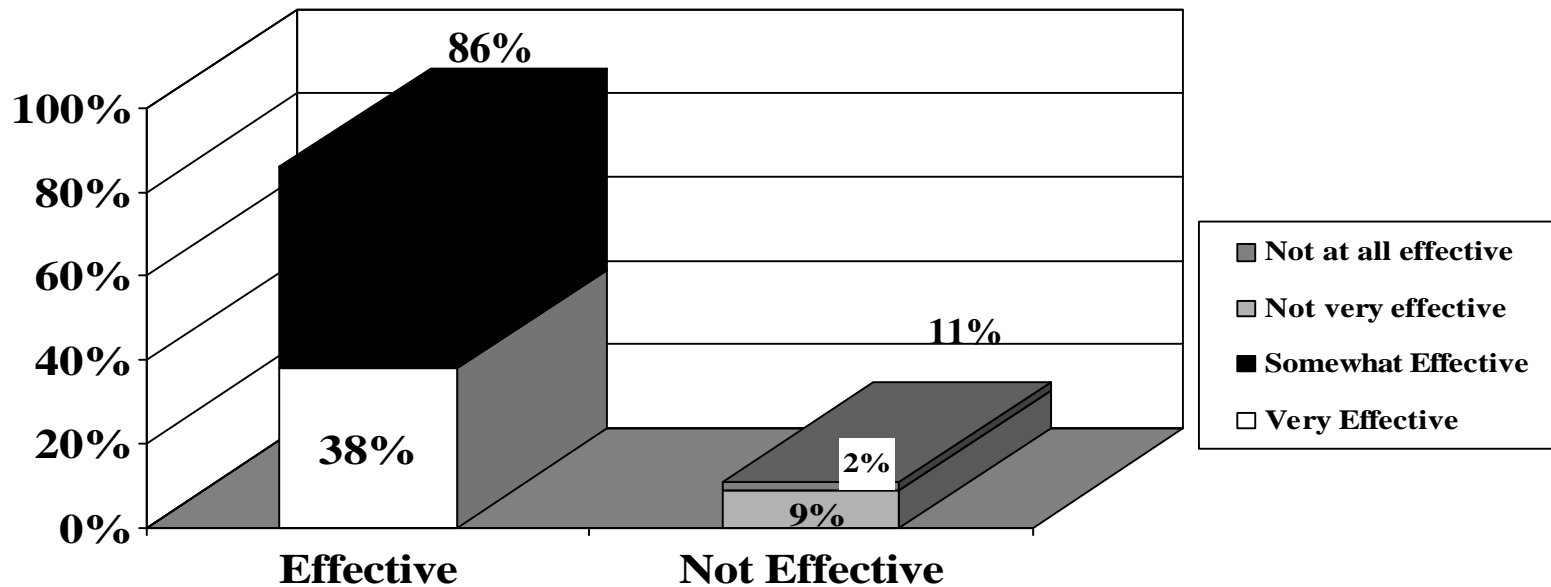
**Voters were asked:** “80% of state drug control funding currently goes to the criminal justice system—law enforcement, courts, and prisons, while 20% goes to education, prevention and treatment. Do you believe that this is an appropriate ratio, do you believe we should increase the percentage spent on criminal justice, or do you believe we should increase the percentage spent on education, prevention, and treatment?”



77% of voters favor increasing the percentage of funding spent on education, prevention and treatment. Only 12% believe the current ratio is appropriate, and even fewer (5%) would increase the percentage spent on criminal justice.



**Voters were asked about possible actions to reduce problem drug use and drug related crime. They were specifically asked: “How effective do you believe it would be to provide treatment to people with a drug problem and increase drug prevention and education programs?”**

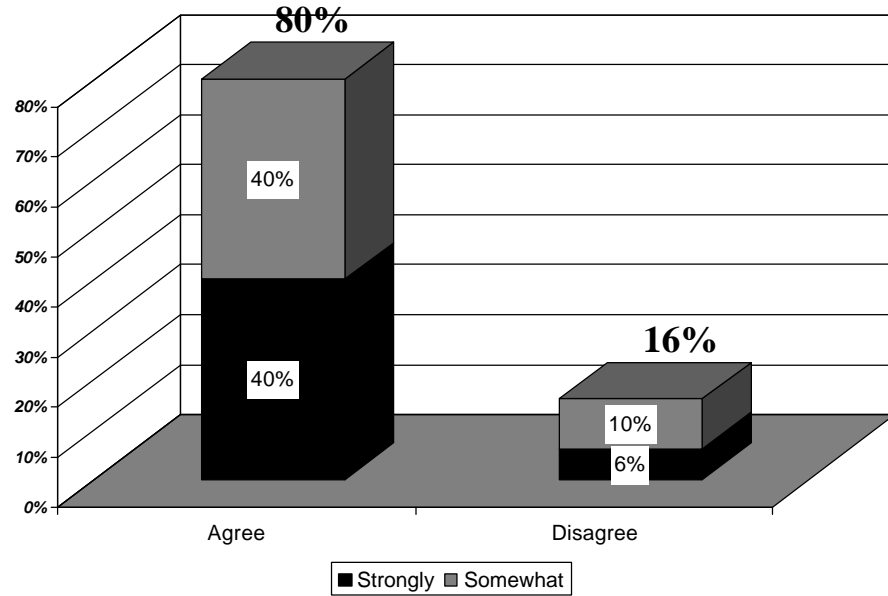


86% of voters believe that providing treatment would be either *very* (38%) or *somewhat* (48%) effective in reducing drug use and drug related crime.



**Voters were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “Providing effective treatment to people with a drug problem would help reduce drug related crime.”**

As the graph at left shows, 80% of Colorado voters agree that providing effective treatment to people with a drug problem would help reduce drug related crime.



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		48%	52%	17%	23%	25%	14%	20%	34%	38%	28%	28%	43%	28%	81%	5%	11%	4%
Strongly Agree	40%	36%	44%	46%	39%	44%	41%	31%	51%	30%	40%	42%	43%	35%	40%	38%	43%	40%
Somewhat Agree	40	42	38	42	42	35	47	40	30	48	42	38	40	43	41	25	43	23
Somewhat Disagree	10	12	9	7	11	12	4	11	9	11	11	7	11	10	9	25	8	14
Strongly Disagree	6	6	7	2	6	8	7	9	8	7	3	7	4	9	6	13	5	9
DK/NA	4	4	3	2	2	2	1	9	2	4	4	5	2	4	4	0	0	14

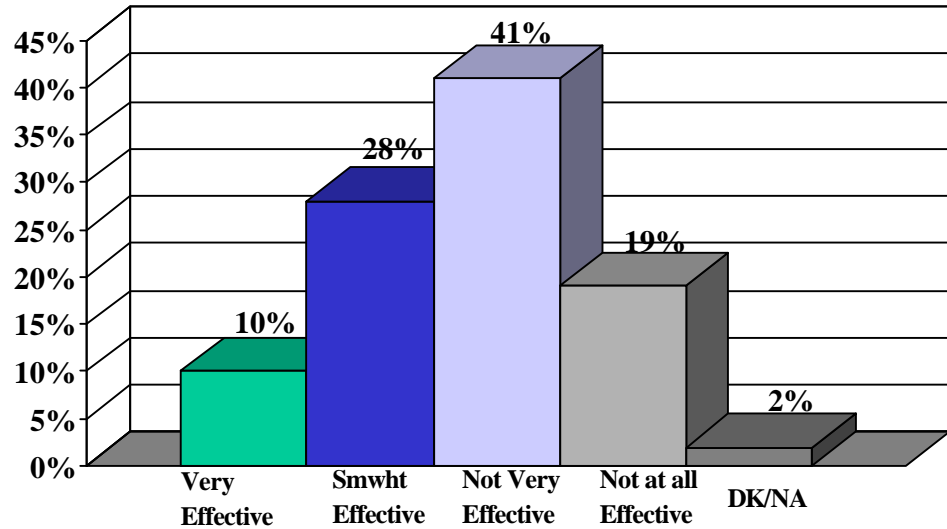


# Voter Opinion on Reducing Sentences for Drug Possession



**Voters were asked about possible actions to reduce drug use and drug related crime.** They were specifically asked: *“How effective would it be to incarcerate someone who is convicted of possessing small quantities of drugs?”*

60% of voters believe that incarcerating people convicted of drug possession is ineffective in reducing drug use and drug related crime.

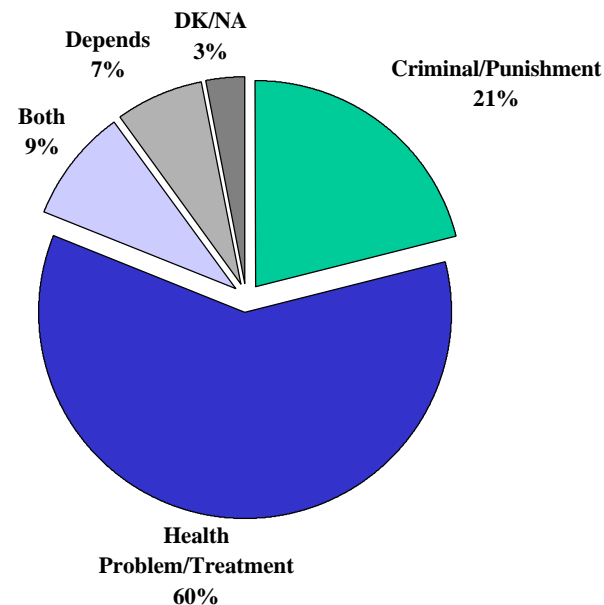


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Very Effective	10%	10%	10%	12%	7%	14%	3%	13%	10%	11%	9%	9%	13%	7%	8%	38%	14%	11%
Somewhat Effective	28	28	28	27	30	29	26	24	20	36	26	28	26	30	26	25	41	28
Not Very Effective	41	44	39	39	41	38	53	40	46	39	39	44	39	43	43	38	30	30
Not at all Effective	19	17	22	21	21	18	16	19	22	12	26	18	21	19	21	0	14	23
DK/NA	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	3	2	2	0	0	2	2	1	0	3	9



**Voters were asked:** *If someone with a drug problem is convicted of possessing small quantities of drugs for their own use, should they be punished by being sent to prison or regarded as someone with a health problem who should receive treatment and supervision?*

As the graph on the right shows, a strong majority of Colorado voters (60%) believe that people who are convicted of possessing drugs should be treated as someone with a health problem and receive treatment. 21% favored incarceration.

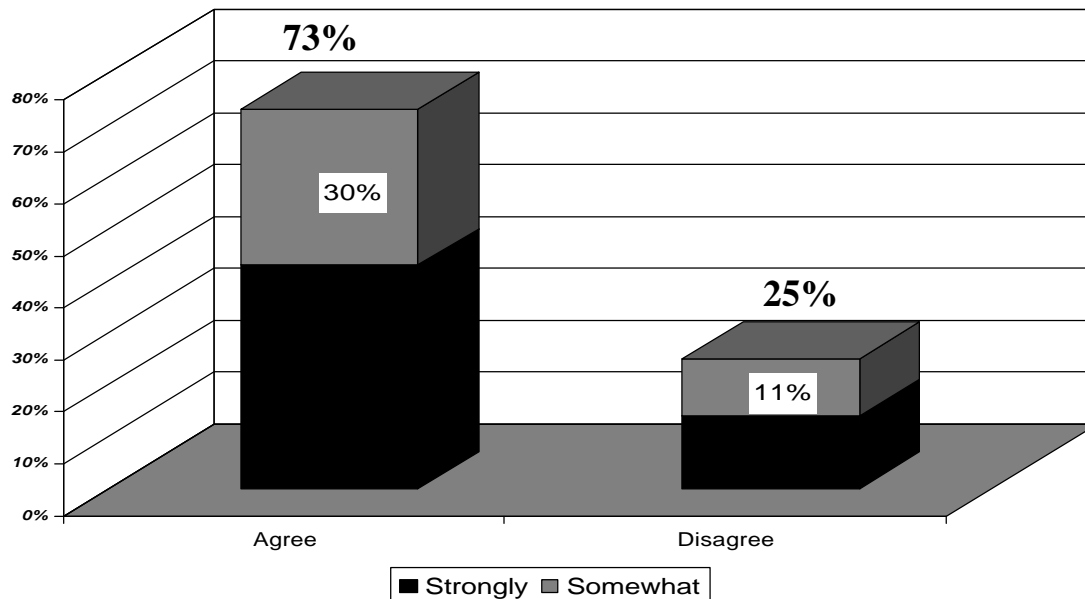


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Criminal/punishment	21%	21%	21%	18%	17%	26%	17%	25%	17%	26%	20%	19%	22%	21%	19%	50%	22%	30%
Health problem/treatment 60	59	62	69	60	56	60	59	67	52	64	63	59	61	61	50	65	58	
Both 9	10	7	9	11	8	8	5	7	11	7	7	9	10	10	0	8	0	
Depends 7	7	7	1	9	9	10	6	7	9	5	8	7	6	8	0	3	9	
DK/NA 3	3	3	2	3	1	4	5	3	2	4	3	4	2	3	0	3	4	



**Voters were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement:** *“Colorado would be better off if we decreased criminal penalties for people possessing small quantities of drugs from a felony to a misdemeanor and spent the money saved on prison costs to increase drug treatment and prevention programs.”*

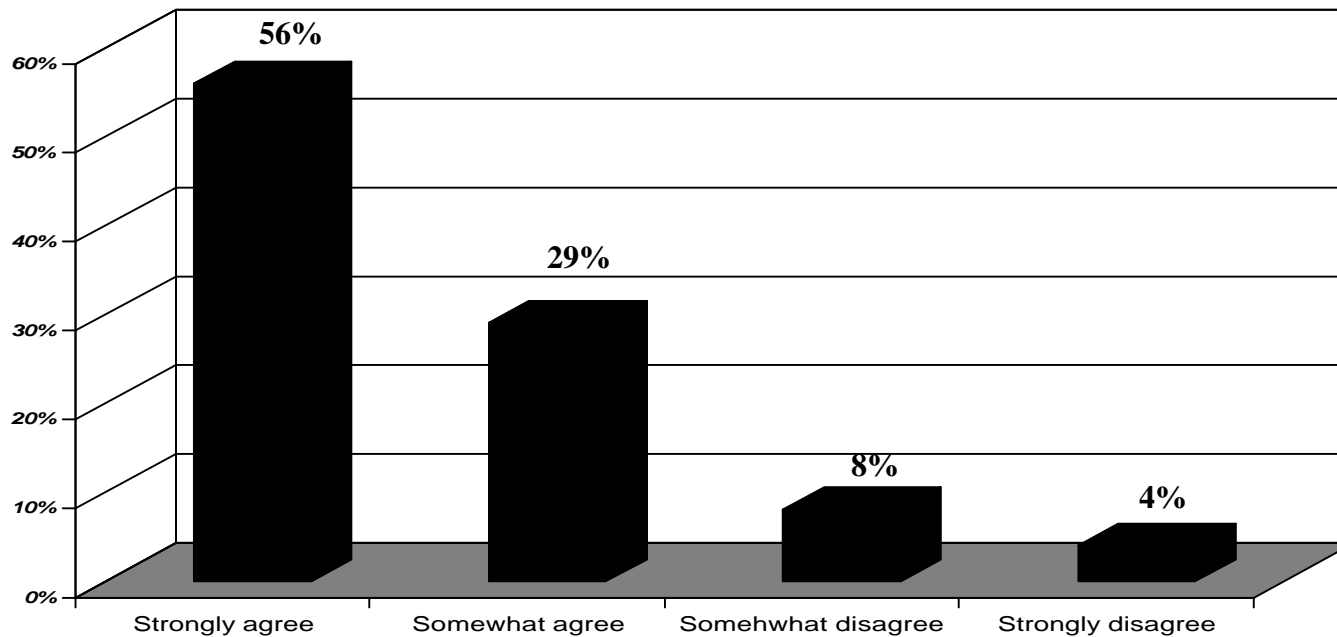
73% of voters either strongly or somewhat favor decreasing penalties for drug possession. Decreasing penalties received a majority in every demographic category.



	Gender			Age					Party Affiliation			Type of Community			Ethnicity			
	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-45	46-55	56-64	65+	Dem	Rep	Unaff.	Urban	Sub urban	Rural/town	Caucasian	Black	Latino	Other
Base	500	239	262	84	116	125	69	100	170	191	139	139	214	140	405	23	53	19
		48%	52%	17%	23%	25%	14%	20%	34%	38%	28%	28%	43%	28%	81%	5%	11%	4%
Strongly Agree	43%	42%	43%	51%	38%	43%	43%	43%	54%	27%	49%	46%	44%	39%	42%	50%	43%	39%
Somewhat Agree	30	30	29	23	26	31	34	34	30	31	27	27	29	31	30	25	30	32
Somewhat Disagree	11	11	11	10	18	9	8	8	6	18	8	13	12	8	11	13	11	5
Strongly Disagree	14	15	12	14	15	17	12	9	6	19	16	12	13	17	13	13	14	25
DK/NA	3	1	4	1	3	1	3	6	3	4	1	2	2	5	3	0	3	



**Voters were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:** *“People with a drug problem who have been convicted of possessing drugs should be allowed to remain in the community under supervision and receive treatment, just like alcoholics, so long as they work and do not commit other crimes.”*



85% of voters strongly (56%) or somewhat (29%) agreed that people arrested for drug possession should be allowed to remain in the community if they are under supervision and receive treatment.

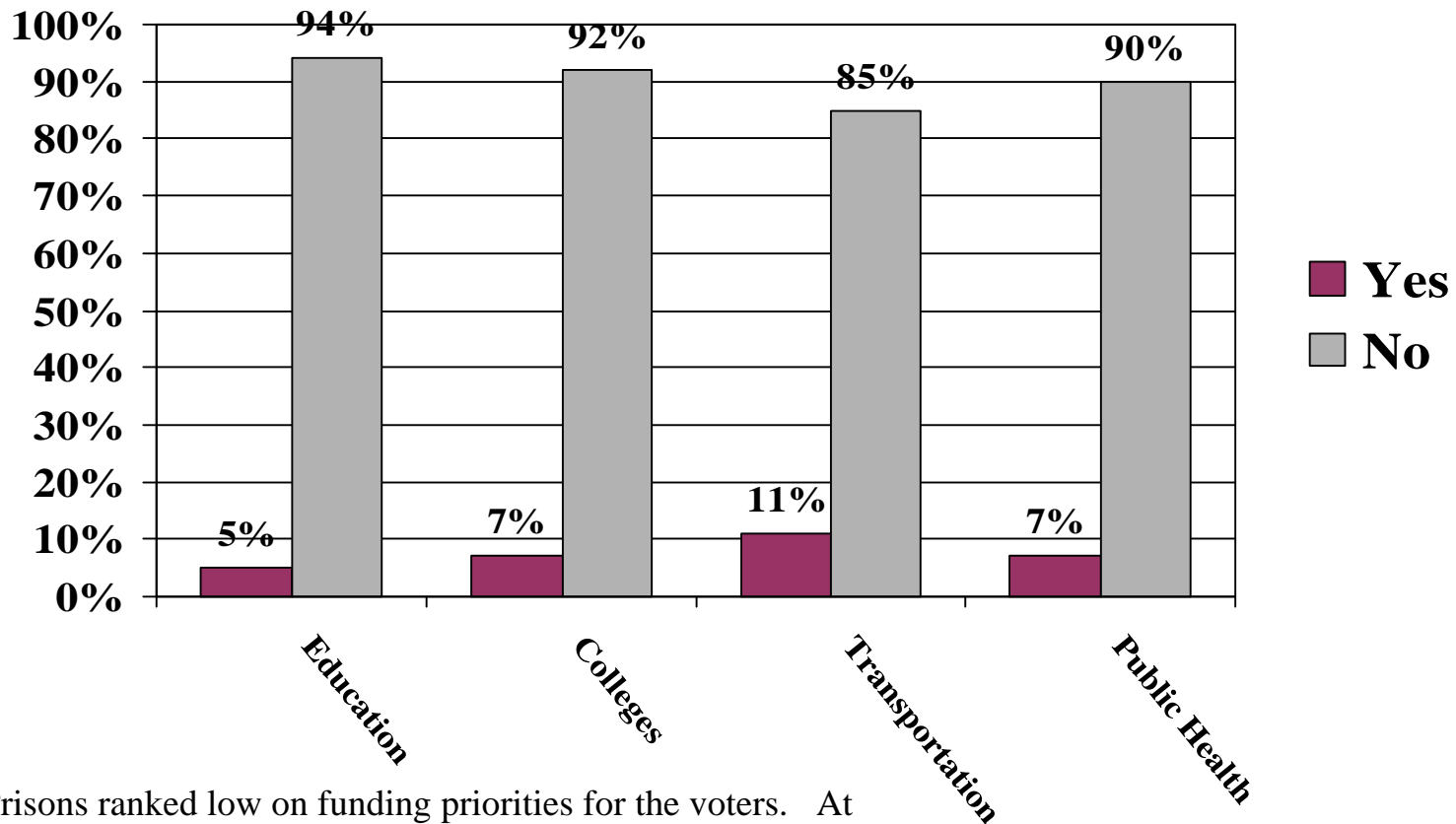


# Voter Opinion on State Funding Priorities



Voters were asked :

*Would you support reducing state spending on the following to build more prisons:*



Prisons ranked low on funding priorities for the voters. At least 85% opposed decreasing funding in other categories in order to increase funding for prisons.



# Demographic Information

### *Age*

18-34	17%
35-44	23
46-55	24
56-65	14
66+	20

### *Party Affiliation*

Democrat	34%
Republican	38
Unaffiliated	28

### *Ethnicity*

White	81%
Black	5
Latino	11
Other	3

### *Congressional District*

01	12%
02	19
03	17
04	18
05	20
06	14

### *Type of Community*

Urban	28%
Suburban	43
Rural/small town	28

### *Gender*

Male	48%
Female	52