AMERICAN VIEWS
ON PROSTITUTION

topos

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In January 2020, the Topos Partnership, working in collaboration with Keating Research, conducted an extensive online survey with likely November 2020 voters concerning public attitudes toward policies related to prostitution. This research demonstrates that voters have a clear preference for public policies regarding prostitution—they want to shrink the industry, not grow it, and will back the solutions and policies that serve that overarching goal.

With that in mind, a solid majority of voters are opposed to fully decriminalizing prostitution, and it is one of the rare issues on which people agree across party lines. Since voters are motivated by a desire to shrink prostitution, they find convincing the idea that full decriminalization (which removes all criminal penalties for those who buy sex and, in some cases, those who facilitate the sale of others for sex), will do the opposite: grow the industry and put more people in harm's way. In fact, they feel so strongly that full decriminalization is the wrong approach that a majority says they would be less likely to vote for a political candidate backing that policy. A majority would rather have prostitution remain fully criminalized to keep it in check.

However, voters are open to the idea of partial decriminalization (meaning making prostitution no longer a crime for people who sell their bodies for sex, while keeping criminal penalties for those who buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex). Initially, the policy receives a slight plurality of support, but over the course of the survey as voters learn more about it, support for partial decriminalization increases while opposition to full decriminalization deepens.

Beyond voters' stance on criminalization policies, large majorities across demographic subgroups support a wide range of solutions to prevent and reduce prostitution. These highly favored policies include a range of ideas such as improving foster care to prevent kids from entering the sex trade, mental health services and addiction treatment, increasing penalties for traffickers and erasing criminal records of sellers, among many other solutions.

The report that follows discusses the results in greater detail. It is our hope and belief that this thorough, even-handed research will provide the public and policymakers the information they need to address this issue.

KEY POLL FINDINGS – AMERICAN VOTERS:

— WANT TO SHRINK THE SEX INDUSTRY, NOT GROW IT.

— OPPOSE FULLY DECRIMINALIZING PROSTITUTION.

— ARE LESS LIKELY TO VOTE FOR A CANDIDATE WHO SUPPORTS FULL DECRIMINALIZATION.

— ARE OPEN TO THE IDEA OF PARTIAL DECRIMINALIZATION.

— SUPPORT A WIDE RANGE OF POLICY AND SERVICE SOLUTIONS TO PREVENT AND REDUCE PROSTITUTION.

PERCEIVED PREVALENCE AND DESIRE FOR CHANGE

The questions at the start of the survey provide basic context for understanding how people come to this issue—how prevalent people think prostitution is as well as their general objective for handling the issue.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Very few American voters see much prostitution, though perceptions are influenced by where one lives.**

2. **The majority of voters (53%) say they want their community to focus on shrinking prostitution.**

DISCUSSION

Very few American voters see much prostitution in their city or town, though perceptions are influenced by where one lives.

When asked how much prostitution they would say is in their city or town, the majority (56%) of voters say "a little" or "not much," while just 19% say "a lot," and 25% are unsure.
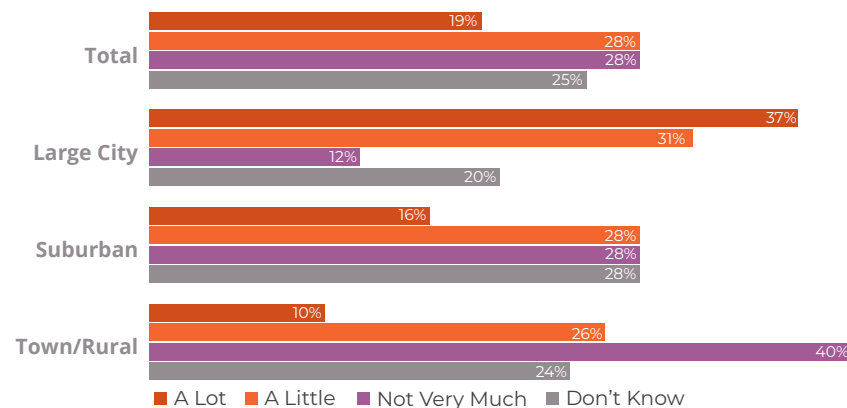
Voters from large cities are more likely to perceive where they live as having "a lot of prostitution" (37%), especially compared to voters from small towns (16%) or rural areas (10%).

In addition, some subgroups perceive higher amounts of prostitution in their city or town, including Hispanic voters (33% say "a lot"), Black voters (31%), younger voters under 35 (28%), and Democratic women (24%). Subgroups perceiving less presence of prostitution include voters living in the Northeast (40% "not very much") and Independent voters (34%).

Interestingly, there is a pattern by age, with more older voters being unsure about how much prostitution there is compared with younger voters: 18-34 years old (17% are unsure), 35-49 (22%), 50-64 (29%), and 65+ (31%).

Perceived Prevalence of Prostitution is Influenced by Where One Lives

How much prostitution would you say there is in your city or town?
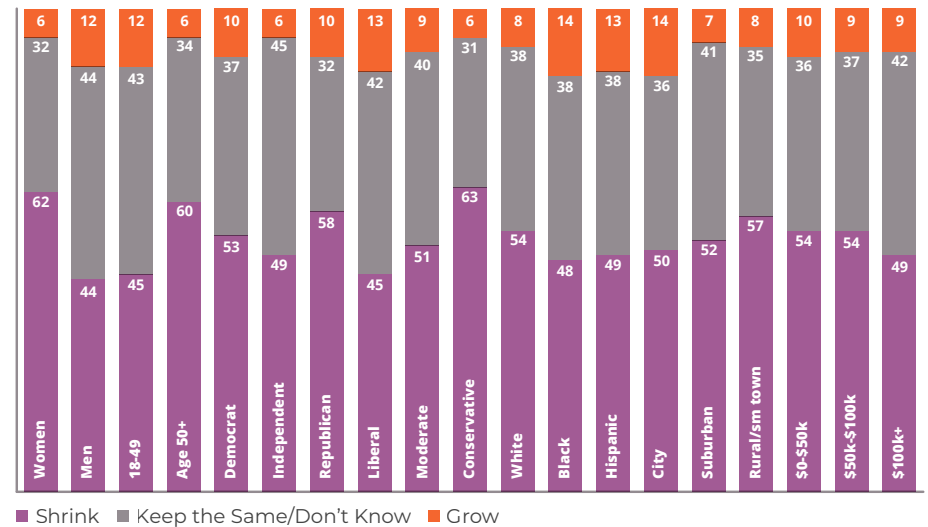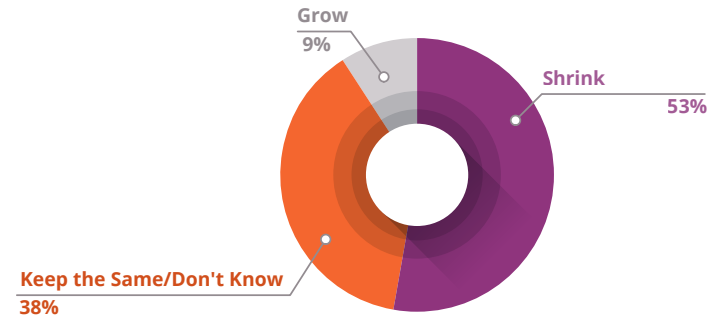
	A Lot	A Little	Not Very Much	Don't Know
Total	19%	28%	28%	25%
Large City	37%	31%	12%	20%
Suburban	16%	28%	28%	28%
Town/Rural	10%	26%	40%	24%

When asked about the overall goal for prostitution policies, a majority of voters (53%) says it would be best for their community to focus on shrinking prostitution.

This includes a plurality in every demographic subgroup, and is a rare issue on which a majority of Democrats (53%) and Republicans (58%) agree. While a plurality of Independents also want to shrink prostitution, an above average percentage (45%) are unsure. A significantly higher percentage of women want to shrink prostitution as compared to men (62% and 44%, respectively), with Republican women and women over 50 showing the highest levels of support for shrinking prostitution (70% and 73%, respectively). Conservatives show the highest support for shrinking prostitution (63%), and a majority of Moderates (51%) and 45% of Liberals agree.

Very few want to "grow" prostitution. Those with lower levels of support for shrinking prostitution are either "unsure" or want to "keep it the same."

Most Want to Shrink Prostitution

In general, do you think it is best for your community to adopt policies and laws that shrink prostitution, keep it the same, or grow prostitution?

Grow
9%

Shrink
53%

Keep the Same/Don't Know
38%

	Women	Men	18-49	Age 50+	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	White	Black	Hispanic	City	Suburban	Rural/sm town	$0-$50k	$50k-$100k	$100k+
Grow	6	12	12	6	10	6	10	13	9	6	8	14	13	14	7	8	10	9	9
Keep the Same/Don't Know	32	44	43	34	37	45	32	42	40	31	38	38	38	36	41	35	36	37	42
Shrink	62	44	45	60	53	49	58	45	51	63	54	48	49	50	52	57	54	54	49

■ Shrink ■ Keep the Same/Don't Know ■ Grow

VOTERS' STANCES ON CRIMINALIZING PROSTITUTION

To gauge voters' stances on criminalizing prostitution, the survey asks for voter support/opposition of four policies regarding buyers, sellers, and third parties who facilitate prostitution.

To elicit unbiased responses, the survey's description of each policy intentionally avoids terminology from the current landscape of U.S. debate that could prejudice response (i.e., pimps, madams, etc.). The following three policies are part of the current U.S. policy debate on prostitution. The survey randomizes the order of the three policies to eliminate any potential order effects. The first policy, full criminalization, is the current policy in most of the United States.

— **Full Criminalization:** "Having prostitution **be a crime for everyone involved,** including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex."

— **Full Decriminalization:** "Having prostitution **no longer be a crime for anyone involved**, including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex."

— **Partial Decriminalization**: "Having prostitution be a crime for those who buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex, while **making it no longer a crime for those who sell sex."**

One additional policy, full legalization, is not prominent in the current U.S. policy debate, but was included to provide a more robust understanding of people's views:

— **Legalization:** "Having prostitution be a **fully legal, licensed and regulated industry."**

KEY FINDINGS

1. Overall, there is high support for full criminalization. Fully 59% want prostitution to remain a crime for all involved, with majority support in every demographic subgroup.

2. There is high opposition to full decriminalization (57% opposed) and majority opposition to legalization (51% oppose).

3. Support for partial decriminalization starts out with slightly more supporting the idea than opposing it (44% support, 40% oppose), and 16% are unsure.

4. There is a strong gender gap across these policies. While both men and women support full criminalization and oppose full decriminalization and legalization, women have higher than average support for full criminalization, and men have higher than average support for full decriminalization and full legalization. Their levels of support for partial decriminalization are initially similar.

FULL CRIMINALIZATION

59% want prostitution to remain a crime for all involved, with majority support in every demographic subgroup.

Though a majority in every demographic group supports full criminalization, there is a stark gender gap with women supporting full criminalization by a 42-percentage-point margin (65% support, 23% oppose) and men supporting full criminalization by a narrower 16-percentage-point margin (52% support, 36% oppose).

Subgroups showing above-average percentages of strong support include women across all political parties: Democratic women (63% support having prostitution remain a crime for everyone involved, with 41% strongly supporting it), Independent women (64%, 41%), Republican women (70%, 44%); and women over 50 years old (72%, 48%). Conservative voters strongly support full criminalization (69% support, 47% strongly).
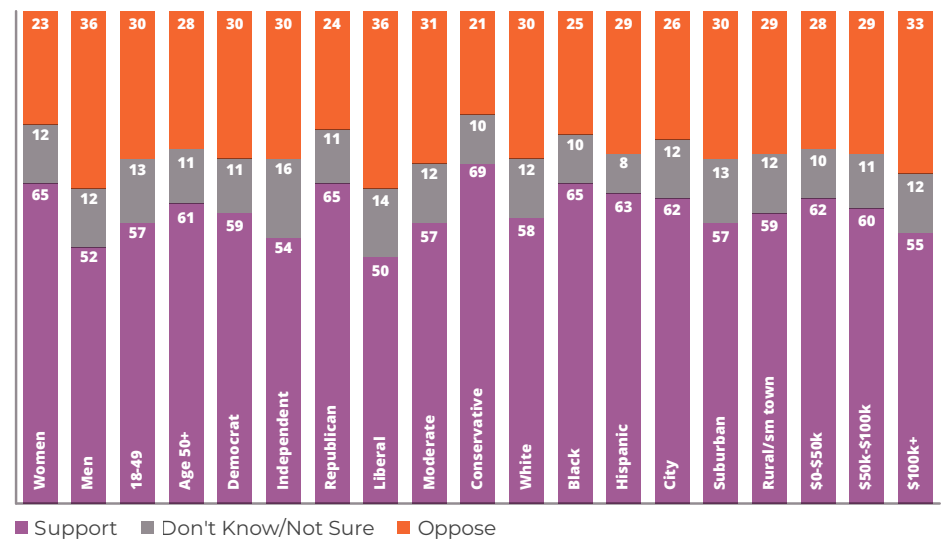
Black and Hispanic voters support full criminalization at higher levels than White voters (65%, 63% and 58%, respectively).

No matter where they live, majorities want prostitution to remain a crime, though people in small town and rural areas feel most strongly: city (62% support, 34% strongly), suburb (57%, 34%) and small town/rural (59%, 41%).

No demographic group opposes full criminalization, but the subgroups showing above-average percentages of strong opposition include Liberal voters (36% oppose, 20% strongly), and men, which is driven by Democratic men (36%, 20%), and Independent men (39%, 18%).

A Majority Supports Having Prostitution Remain a Crime for Everyone Involved

Do you support or oppose – having prostitution be a crime for everyone involved, including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution?

Don't Know/Not Sure 12%
Strongly Oppose 13%
Strongly Support 36%
Somewhat Oppose 16%
Somewhat Support 23%

	Women	Men	18-49	Age 50+	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	White	Black	Hispanic	City	Suburban	Rural/sm town	$0-$50k	$50k-$100k	$100k+
Oppose	23	36	30	28	30	30	24	36	31	21	30	25	29	26	30	29	28	29	33
Don't Know/Not Sure	12	12	13	11	11	16	11	14	12	10	12	10	8	12	13	12	10	11	12
Support	65	52	57	61	59	54	65	50	57	69	58	65	63	62	57	59	62	60	55

■ Support　■ Don't Know/Not Sure　■ Oppose
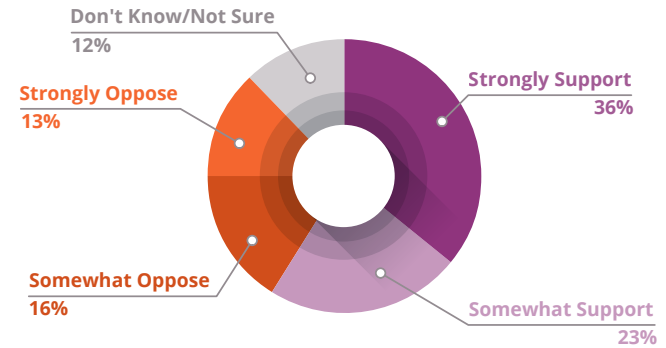
FULL DECRIMINALIZATION

Support for full decriminalization lies on the opposite extreme of opinion, a mirror image of full criminalization, with a majority opposing full decriminalization (57%) overall and just 30% supporting the idea.

The same stark gender gap that is present in response to full criminalization also appears in response to this policy, with women opposing full decriminalization by a 42-point margin (64% oppose, 22% support) and men opposing it by a narrower 12-point margin (50% oppose, 38% support).

The same groups that most support full criminalization, such as women and Conservative voters, also strongly oppose full decriminalization, including Conservative voters (70% oppose full decriminalization, 58% strongly), women (64%, 48%), especially Republican women (73%, 57%), and women over 50 years old (75%, 63%).
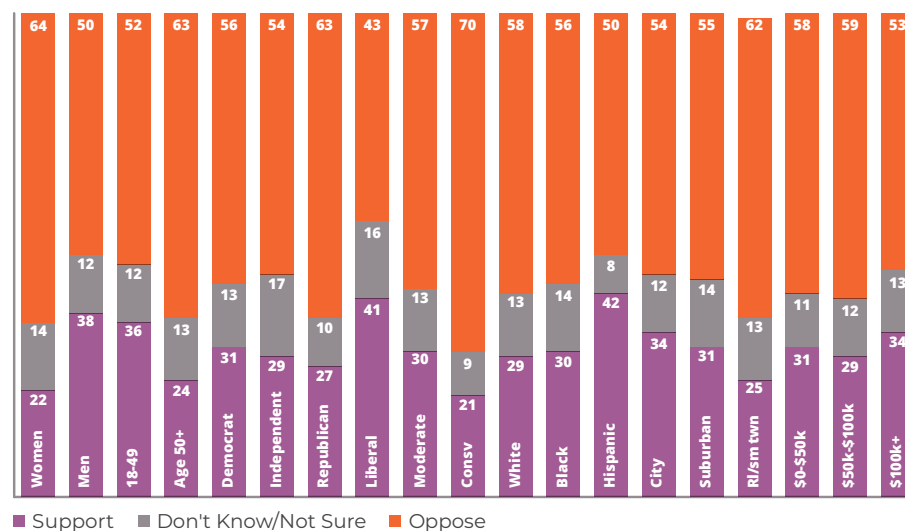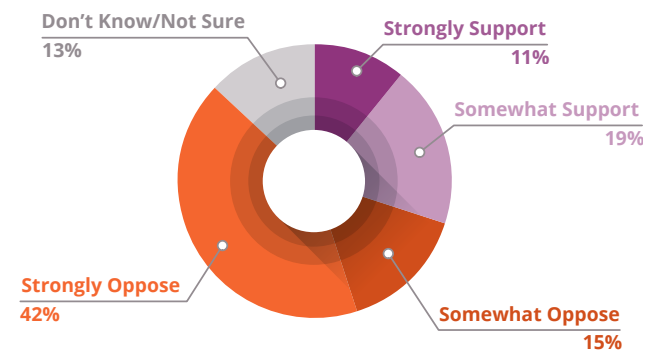
Majorities oppose full decriminalization no matter where they live, though people in small town and rural areas feel most strongly: city (54% oppose, 37% strongly), suburb (55%, 40%) and small town/rural (62%, 48%).

No demographic group supports full decriminalization by any substantial percentage, but the subgroups showing above-average percentages of support include men under 50 years old (41% support full decriminalization, 19% strongly), Democratic men (41%, 16%), Republican men (38%, 18%) and Hispanic voters (42%, 17%). Among Liberals, 41% support the idea, but just 15% feel strongly about it.

A Majority Opposes Fully Decriminalizing Prostitution

Do you support or oppose - having prostitution no longer be a crime for anyone involved, including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex?

Don't Know/Not Sure 13%
Strongly Support 11%
Somewhat Support 19%
Somewhat Oppose 15%
Strongly Oppose 42%

	Women	Men	18-49	Age 50+	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Liberal	Moderate	Consv	White	Black	Hispanic	City	Suburban	Rl/sm twn	$o-$50k	$50k-$100k	$100k+
Oppose	64	50	52	63	56	54	63	43	57	70	58	56	50	54	55	62	58	59	53
Don't Know/Not Sure	14	12	12	13	13	17	10	16	13	9	13	14	8	12	14	13	11	12	13
Support	22	38	36	24	31	29	27	41	30	21	29	30	42	34	31	25	31	29	34

■ Support ■ Don't Know/Not Sure ■ Oppose
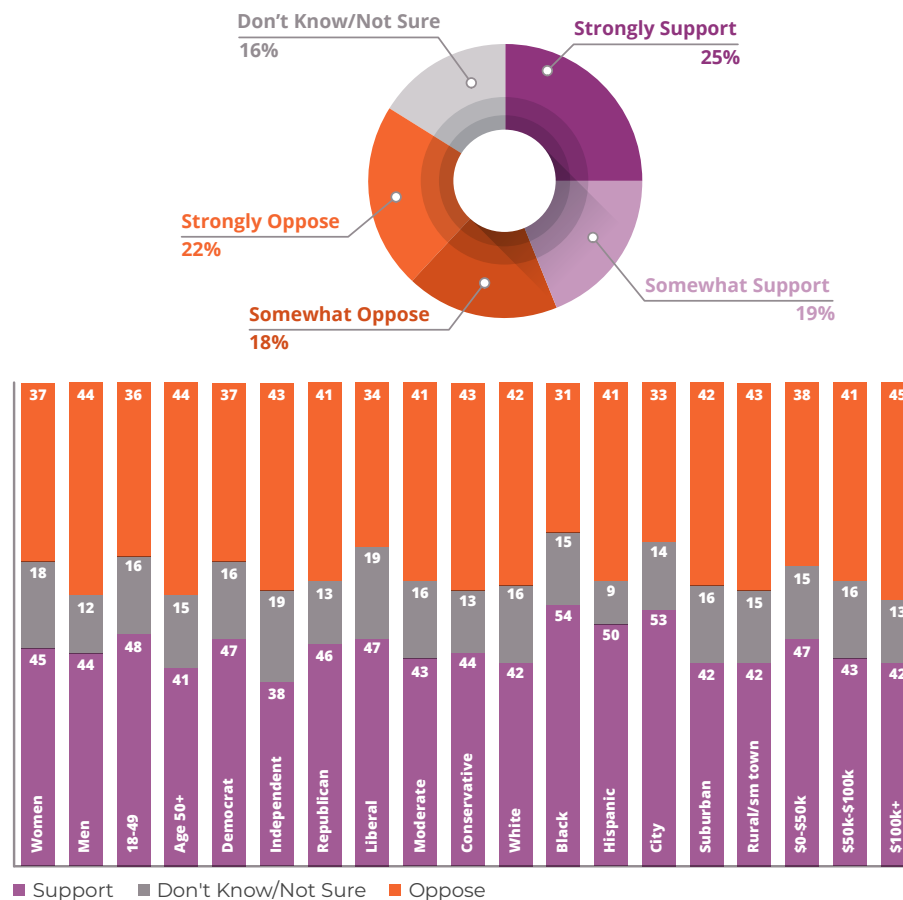
PARTIAL DECRIMINALIZATION

Support for partial decriminalization starts out with slightly more supporting the idea than opposing it (44% support, 40% oppose, and 16% are unsure).

Interestingly, support for partially decriminalizing prostitution crosses party lines, with similar levels of support among Democrats (47% support partial decriminalization, 28% strongly) and Republicans (46%, 27%). Subgroups with higher percentages of strong support include voters living in cities (53% support partial decriminalization, 30% strongly), voters under 35 years old (53%, 30%), Black voters (54%, 33%) and Hispanic voters (50%, 30%).

Overall, this policy starts out with less of a gender gap. Women tend to support the policy, though double-digit percentages are unsure: 45% of women support partial decriminalization, 37% oppose and 18% are unsure. Men are mixed on the policy: 44% of men support partial decriminalization, 44% oppose and 12% are unsure. However, certain subgroups of men have higher opposition including Republican men (49% oppose partial decriminalization, 32% strongly) and men over 50 years old (48%, 27%).

Voters are Mixed on Partially Decriminalizing Prostitution

Do you support or oppose – having prostitution be a crime for those who buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex, while making it no longer a crime for those who sell sex?

Don't Know/Not Sure 16%
Strongly Support 25%
Strongly Oppose 22%
Somewhat Support 19%
Somewhat Oppose 18%

	Women	Men	18-49	Age 50+	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	White	Black	Hispanic	City	Suburban	Rural/sm town	$0-$50k	$50k-$100k	$100k+
Oppose	37	44	36	44	37	43	41	34	41	43	42	31	41	33	42	43	38	41	45
Don't Know/Not Sure	18	12	16	15	16	19	13	19	16	13	16	15	9	14	16	15	15	16	13
Support	45	44	48	41	47	38	46	47	43	44	42	54	50	53	42	42	47	43	42

■ Support ■ Don't Know/Not Sure ■ Oppose

LEGALIZATION

Similar to full decriminalization, an overall majority (51%) opposes legalization, while just 38% say they support it.

Though fully licensed and regulated prostitution is not a prominent part of the policy debate in the US, the survey includes a measure of people's support to provide a more complete picture.

Like full criminalization and full decriminalization, there is a striking gender gap in response to legalization. Women oppose legalization by a 30-percentage-point margin (29% support legalization, 59% oppose it including 47% strong opposition). Opposition is especially strong among older women over 50 (65% oppose, 53% strongly).

In contrast, men support legalization by a 6-percentage-point margin (47% support legalization, 19% strongly support, and 41% oppose it). Democratic men support legalization (48% support, 43% oppose) as do Independent men (46% support, 34% oppose), while Republican men narrowly oppose legalization (45% support, 48% oppose).

Liberal voters support legalization (50% support, 40% oppose), while Conservative voters oppose it (24% support, 68% oppose).

There is an interesting socioeconomic pattern, with more educated, higher-income voters less opposed to legalization than less educated, lower-income voters—for example, voters with a college degree (41% support legalization, 45% oppose), some college (35% support, 57% oppose) and high school degree or less (37% support, 50% oppose); those who earn $100k+ (45% support, 45% oppose), $50-100k (36% support, 52% oppose), and those who earn less than $50k (37% support, 53% oppose).

Pluralities oppose legalization no matter where they live, though people in small town and rural areas feel most strongly: city (47% oppose, 34% strongly), suburb (46%, 33%) and small town/rural (59%, 47%).

Majority Opposes Fully Legal, Licensed Prostitution

Do you support or oppose – having prostitution be a fully legal, licensed and regulated industry?
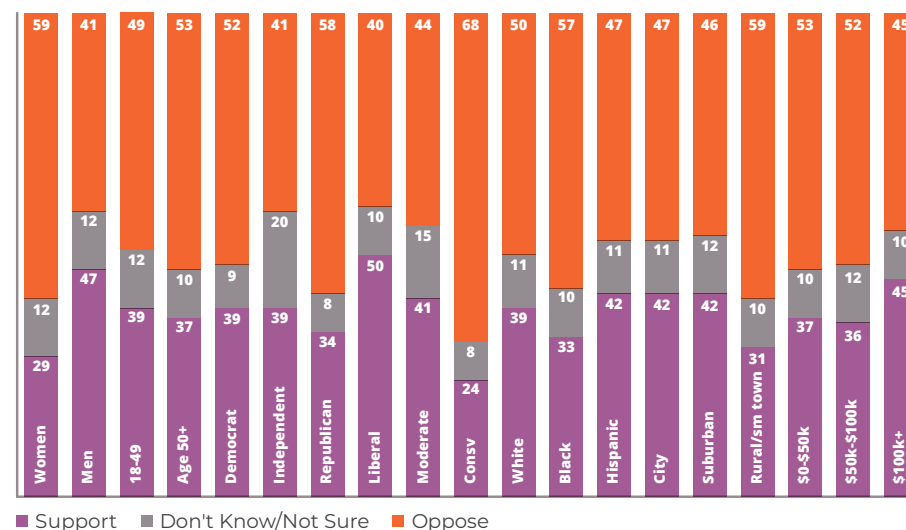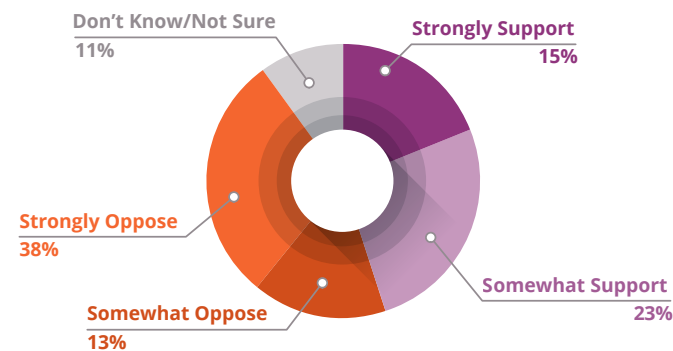
DISTINGUISHING SUPPORT ACROSS THE POLICIES REVEALS MORE CONSENSUS FOR PARTIAL DECRIMINALIZATION

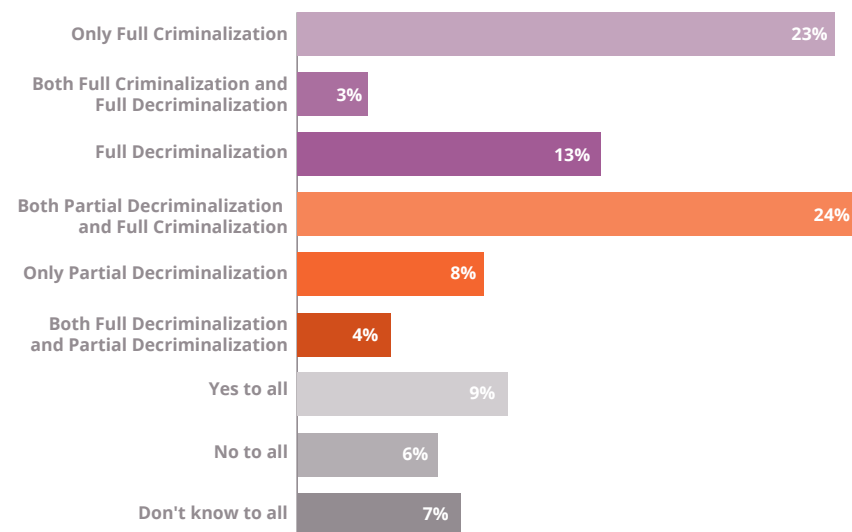**As noted, a majority supports full criminalization and a majority opposes full decriminalization, while support for partial decriminalization starts out more mixed. However, sorting respondents across the three policy stances finds that response is far more fluid and partial decriminalization is more of a consensus policy than first appears.**

This is a fluid topic. Nearly half (47%) support multiple policies or are undecided. While a majority says they support having prostitution remain a crime for everyone involved, just 23% support only that policy. They are the voters who are likely to be most resistant to a conversation about changing prostitution policy. At the opposite end of the spectrum, only 13% support only full decriminalization. One-quarter (24%) support partial decriminalization and full criminalization, 8% support only partial decriminalization, and an additional 4% support both partial and full decriminalization. Six percent are opposed to all three policies, 9% support all three, and 7% are undecided about all three policies.

Those directly impacted by prostitution prefer partial over full decriminalization. Comparing support across all three policies finds that among those who have sold their bodies for sex or personally know someone who has (representing 13% of survey respondents), one-third (35%) support partial decriminalization but not full decriminalization, 26% support both partial and full decriminalization, 14% say prostitution should be a crime, and just 11% support full decriminalization as the only solution.

COMPARISON OF SUPPORT ACROSS ALL THREE POLICIES

Policy	Support
Only Full Criminalization	23%
Both Full Criminalization and Full Decriminalization	3%
Full Decriminalization	13%
Both Partial Decriminalization and Full Criminalization	24%
Only Partial Decriminalization	8%
Both Full Decriminalization and Partial Decriminalization	4%
Yes to all	9%
No to all	6%
Don't know to all	7%

LOCAL POLICY PREFERENCE

Furthermore, when asked to choose one policy as the best policy for their local government to enact, the highest percentage of voters select full criminalization. On the opposite extreme, when asked to choose one policy as the worst policy for their local government to enact, the highest percentage of voters select full decriminalization.

There is strong overlap between subgroups that have higher than average preference for full criminalization as the best policy for their local government to enact and full decriminalization as the worst policy, such as Republican women (62% full criminalization is best, 61% full decriminalization is worst), and women over 50 years old (62% and 57%, respectively).

Suppose your local government was considering this issue. Which policy do you think would be the (best/worst) for your local government to enact?

Full Criminalization — Best Policy: 45%, Worst Policy: 21%
Partial Decriminalization — Best Policy: 22%, Worst Policy: 18%
Full Decriminalization — Best Policy: 18%, Worst Policy: 46%
Don't Know — Best Policy: 15%, Worst Policy: 15%

■ Best Policy   ■ Worst Policy
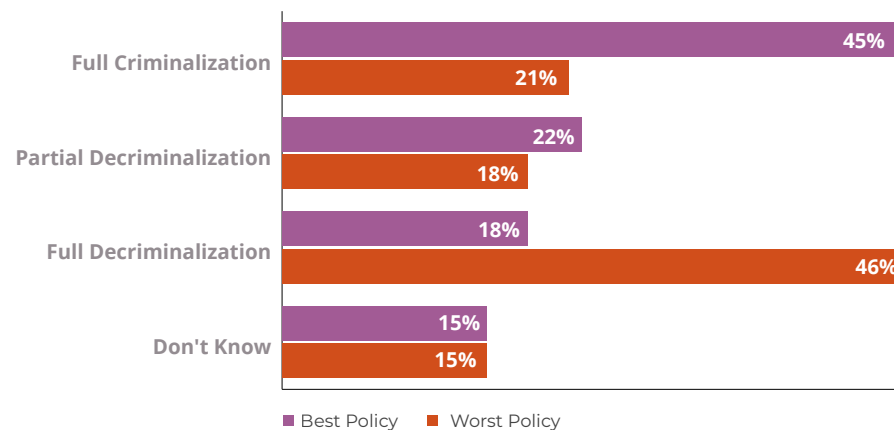
SHIFTS IN OPINION DURING THE SURVEY

Over the course of the survey, research participants were exposed to various solutions to address the issue—messages supporting partial rather than full decriminalization, as well as messages in support of full decriminalization. To determine whether or not this additional information influences opinion, research participants were re-asked the questions concerning their policy stances toward the end of the survey.

KEY FINDINGS

1. With additional information, there is an 8-percentage-point gain in support for partial decriminalization (from 44% initial support to 52% support after information).

2. Additional information also results in a 9-percentage-point gain in opposition to full decriminalization (from 57% initial opposition to 66% opposition after information).

3. Voters' opinions on full criminalization and legalization remain stable.

DISCUSSION

Over the course of the survey, respondents were exposed to reasoning both for and against full decriminalization. That additional information creates significant movement in voters' opinions, increasing support for partial decriminalization by 8 percentage points, and increasing opposition to full decriminalization by 9 percentage points. Meanwhile, voters' opinions on full criminalization and legalization remain stable.

AFTER DEBATE, INCREASED OPPOSITION TO FULL DECRIMINALIZATION AND INCREASED SUPPORT FOR PARTIAL DECRIMINALIZATION

Full Decriminalization | Partial Decriminalization

Pre-Exposure: Support 30%, Don't Know/Not Sure 13%, Oppose 57%
Post-Exposure: Support 25%, Don't Know/Not Sure 9%, Oppose 66%
+9 PT OPPOSE

Pre-Exposure: Support 44%, Don't Know/Not Sure 16%, Oppose 40%
Post-Exposure: Support 52%, Don't Know/Not Sure 12%, Oppose 36%
+8 PT SUPPORT

■ Support ■ Don't Know/Not Sure ■ Oppose
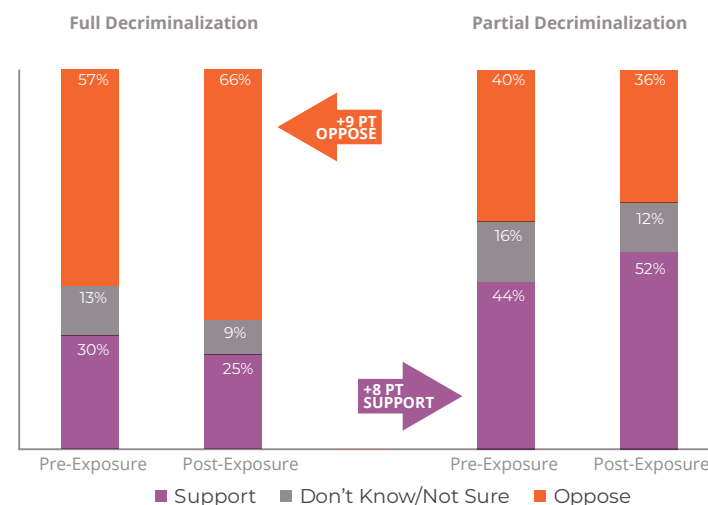
Voters across demographic subgroups *become more supportive of partial decriminalization,* with the exception of Republicans and Conservatives. The most significant shifts are among: Independents (+13 percentage points in support for partial decriminalization), Moderates (+13), voters under 35 years old (+11), Democrats (+10), women (+10), higher-income voters (+10), and Black and Hispanic voters (+10 each).

At the same time, all subgroups become *more likely to oppose full decriminalization* by the end of the survey. Some of the more notable shifts towards opposing full decriminalization include: Liberal voters (+13 percentage points in opposition to full decriminalization) as well as Moderate voters (+10), Democrats (+10), older voters (+10), and voters living in rural areas (+11).

SHIFT BY SUBGROUP: SUPPORT FOR PARTIAL DECRIMINALIZATION

Subgroup	Pre Support	Change	Post Support
Women	45%	+10%	55%
Men	44%	+4%	48%
18-49	48%	+8%	56%
Age 50+	41%	+6%	47%
Democrat	47%	+10%	57%
Independent	38%	+13%	51%
Republican	46%	-1%	45%
Liberal	47%	+8%	55%
Moderate	43%	+13%	56%
Conservative	44%	-1%	43%

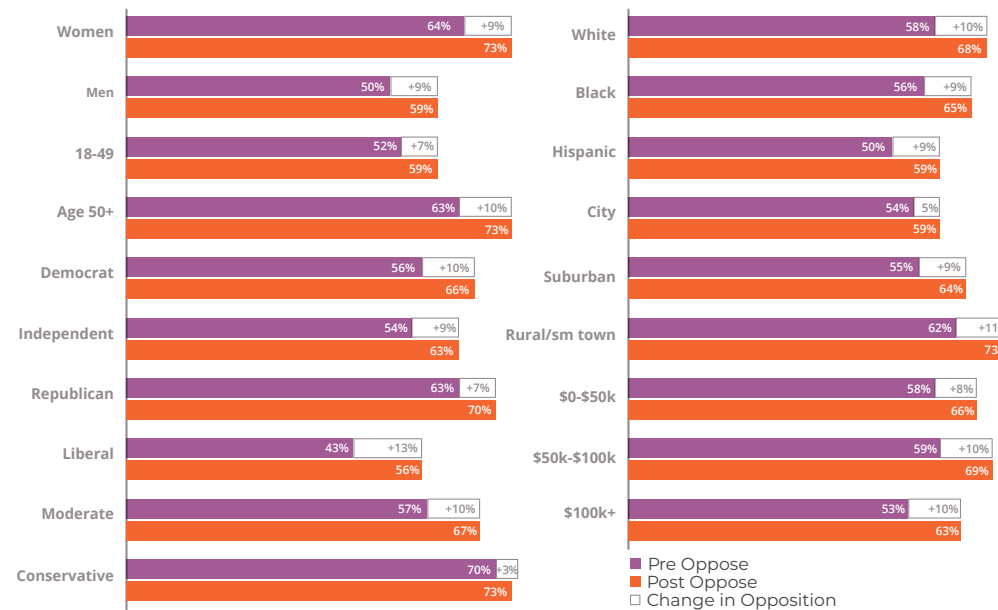| Subgroup	Pre Support	Change	Post Support
White	42%	+7%	49%
Black	54%	+10%	64%
Hispanic	50%	+10%	60%
City	53%	+8%	61%
Suburban	42%	+7%	49%
Rural/sm town	42%	+6%	48%
$0-$50k	47%	+9%	56%
$50k-$100k	43%	+6%	49%
$100k+	42%	+10%	52%

■ Pre Support
■ Post Support
□ Change in Support

SHIFT BY SUBGROUP: OPPOSITION TO FULL DECRIMINALIZATION

Subgroup	Pre Oppose	Change	Post Oppose
Women	64%	+9%	73%
Men	50%	+9%	59%
18-49	52%	+7%	59%
Age 50+	63%	+10%	73%
Democrat	56%	+10%	66%
Independent	54%	+9%	63%
Republican	63%	+7%	70%
Liberal	43%	+13%	56%
Moderate	57%	+10%	67%
Conservative	70%	+3%	73%

Subgroup	Pre Oppose	Change	Post Oppose
White	58%	+10%	68%
Black	56%	+9%	65%
Hispanic	50%	+9%	59%
City	54%	5%	59%
Suburban	55%	+9%	64%
Rural/sm town	62%	+11%	73%
$0-$50k	58%	+8%	66%
$50k-$100k	59%	+10%	69%
$100k+	53%	+10%	63%

■ Pre Oppose
■ Post Oppose
□ Change in Opposition

Overall, voters' opinions do not shift much on full criminalization or legalization, though there is some movement in certain subgroups. While voters' opinions on full criminalization do not move much overall, Independent women shift away from strong support (5-percentage-point drop in strong support) towards opposition (7-percentage-point increase in opposition). Democratic men also shift towards opposition of full criminalization (+5). Voters' opinions on legalization shift slightly towards opposition (4-percentage-point increase in opposition). Subgroups with shifts to strong opposition on legalization include voters living in the South (8-percentage-point increase in strong opposition), Independent men (+10), and Independent voters over 50 (+11).

When voters were asked to reconsider which of the three policies in current U.S. policy debates would be the best for their local government to enact, partial decriminalization experiences a slight shift as the preferred policy (3-percentage-point increase in those saying it would be the best policy for their community). Subgroups catalyzing this shift include Independent voters (5-percentage-point increase in saying partial decriminalization would be the "best policy"), White voters (+5), Republican Men (+5), Republicans over 50 years old (+5), and voters living in the Northeast (+5). Subgroups that shift away from full decriminalization as their preferred policy include Democratic women (5-percentage-point drop in those saying it would be the best policy for their community), Republicans over 50 years old (-5), and Independent voters ages 18-49 (-7).

VOTER TYPOLOGY

By following patterns of response across the survey findings, it is possible to distinguish groups of voters who are particularly likely to support each of the policy stances and who are likely to shift with more information. The first three categories are particularly likely to be targets for the current policy debate over partial and full decriminalization.

Core Supporters of Partial Decriminalization

Several subgroups of voters start the survey with higher than average support for partial decriminalization, and move to even higher levels of support over the course of the survey, including Black voters, Hispanic voters, younger voters, and urban voters.

Swing to Support Partial Decriminalization

Some voters start out with moderate or mixed support for partial decriminalization, but as they learn more, they shift to support the policy, including Democratic and Independent women, and Moderate voters.

Swing Away from Full Decriminalization

Some voters shift away from supporting full decriminalization as they learn more about the policy, including Liberal voters and those who live in small town/rural areas.
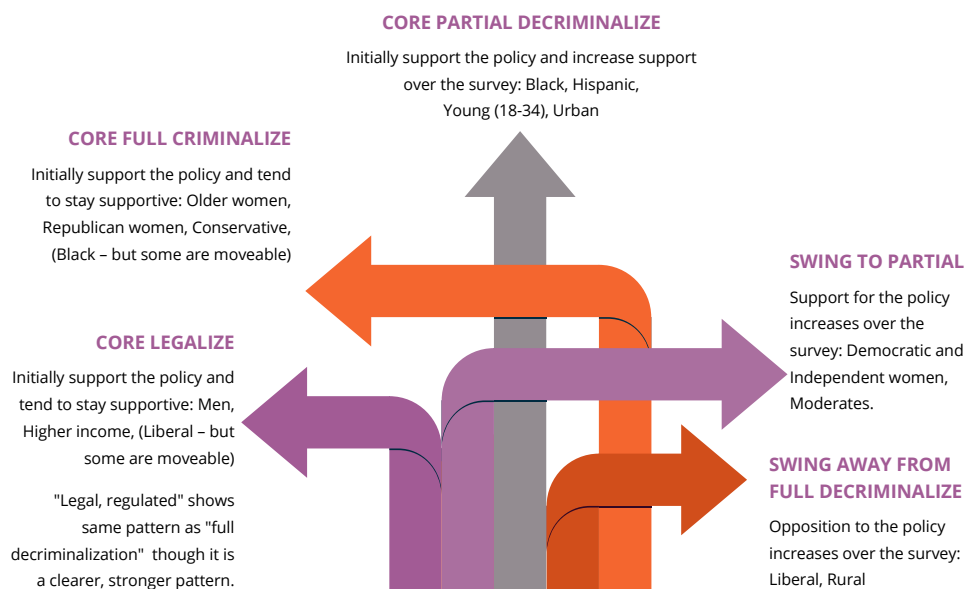
Core Full Criminalization

Those voters who are initially supportive of full criminalization in higher than average percentages, and continue to back that policy as they learn more, include older women, Republican women, and Conservative voters. In addition, there is a group of Black voters who fall into this category as well, but, as noted above, many Black voters support or shift toward supporting partial decriminalization.

Core Legalization/Full Decriminalization

Some voters support full decriminalization and even legalization over the course of the survey, including men, and higher-income voters. Some Liberal voters are in this category, though, as noted above, many Liberal voters are malleable and shift away from full decriminalization.

VOTER TYPOLOGY

CORE PARTIAL DECRIMINALIZE
Initially support the policy and increase support over the survey: Black, Hispanic, Young (18-34), Urban

CORE FULL CRIMINALIZE
Initially support the policy and tend to stay supportive: Older women, Republican women, Conservative, (Black – but some are moveable)

CORE LEGALIZE
Initially support the policy and tend to stay supportive: Men, Higher income, (Liberal – but some are moveable)

"Legal, regulated" shows same pattern as "full decriminalization" though it is a clearer, stronger pattern.

SWING TO PARTIAL
Support for the policy increases over the survey: Democratic and Independent women, Moderates.

SWING AWAY FROM FULL DECRIMINALIZE
Opposition to the policy increases over the survey: Liberal, Rural

REACTIONS TO DECRIMINALIZATION ARGUMENTS

As mentioned above, voters were exposed to a variety of arguments about decriminalization policies after providing their initial assessments for a range of policies.

Some of these arguments made the case for partial decriminalization rather than full decriminalization. Other arguments made the case for full decriminalization. Half the survey respondents heard messages making the case for partial rather than full decriminalization first, and half heard the messages making the case for full decriminalization first. Within each section, the order of messages was randomized.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Overall, far more voters find reasons for supporting partial decriminalization to be more convincing than reasons for supporting full decriminalization.**

2. **The idea that no criminal penalties for buyers and facilitators will result in growing the industry is compelling, as is the idea that it is a harmful lifestyle that causes trauma.**

3. **There is clearly a role for a solutions-oriented conversation, focused on prevention and outreach.**

DISCUSSION

Overall, far more voters find reasons for partial, not full decriminalization, to be more convincing than reasons for supporting full decriminalization. Two-thirds and more find convincing a range of statements regarding the impact of partial vs. full decriminalization. The notion that full decriminalization will grow the industry is clearly convincing to most, as is the idea that it is a harmful lifestyle that causes trauma.

Messages for Partial, not Full Decriminalization are Convincing to Most

Please read some statements that people have made for why we should protect from legal penalty those who sell sex, but make it a crime for those who buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex. After you read each statement, please indicate if it is very convincing, somewhat convincing, not very convincing, or not at all convincing.

	Very / Somewhat Convincing
Prostitution is a harmful lifestyle that causes Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression among those who are sold for sex, and leaves many unable to maintain healthy intimate relationships. If there are no criminal penalties for those who buy sex and those who sell others for sex, then demand for prostitution will increase, putting more people in harm's way.	73%
(HALF SAMPLE)* If it is no longer a crime to sell others for sex, then we will see increased sex trafficking, including child trafficking, and it will be harder for police to arrest child traffickers, since their activities will be masked by prostitution that is not illegal.	71%
(HALF SAMPLE)* If it is no longer a crime to sell others for sex, then we will see increased sex trafficking, especially among our most marginalized and already exploited communities.	69%
If it is no longer a crime to sell others for sex, then the sex trade will grow because exploiters will push for bigger markets to meet the bigger demand – leading to brothels in our local communities and sex tourism in our cities. We want and deserve better for our communities so we should be taking steps to shrink the sex trade.	67%
Prostitution is not a "victimless crime" – it causes psychological and emotional trauma to the women involved. Fully decriminalizing it will normalize prostitution and imply it is just a job like any other, just like being a teacher, or nurse, or waitress, and that's simply not the case.	66%

* The two questions marked with (HALF SAMPLE) denote that the sample was split so that 500 respondents were asked the first iteration of the question and the other 500 were asked the second iteration.

In addition, a message about proven solutions to reduce the number of women and girls in the sex trade is the most convincing message overall, suggesting that people want a conversation about prevention and outreach.

We have proven solutions to reduce the number of women and girls in the sex trade. We know what it takes to close on-ramps to prostitution, like improving the foster care system. We also know how to build more exit ramps for those who want to leave prostitution, like clearing their criminal records, increasing economic opportunities and providing safe places to go when they are ready to leave the sex trade.	**75%**

While these messages are rated highly across demographic groups, the subgroups who find these messages more convincing than average include Democratic and Republican women.

In contrast, *every* message supporting full decriminalization received lower ratings than every message supporting partial over full decriminalization.

Messages Supporting Full Decriminalization are Less Convincing	
Now, I'd like you to read some statements that some people have made in support of proposals for having prostitution no longer be a crime for anyone involved, including those who buy sex, those who are being sold for sex, and those who facilitate or sell others for sex. After you read each statement, please indicate if it is very convincing, somewhat convincing, not very convincing, or not at all convincing.	
	Very / Somewhat Convincing
Prostitution can be physically dangerous. Making it legal will bring it out of the shadows so that people can be safer and ask police for help when they need to.	**56%**
This is about choice. Society shouldn't tell a person what to do with their own body, and that includes whether or not a person wants to sell or buy sex.	**45%**
Sex work is a job, and for some people it is the best option to earn a living. Keeping sex work illegal makes it even harder for people to make ends meet.	**40%**

SOLUTIONS FOR REDUCING PROSTITUTION

The survey introduces voters to several measures aimed at reducing prostitution. The policies can be separated broadly into three categories:

1) preventive policies that stop people from entering the sex trade, 2) policies that provide off-ramps for those who wish to leave the sex trade, and 3) punitive measures for buyers, traffickers, and third-party facilitators.
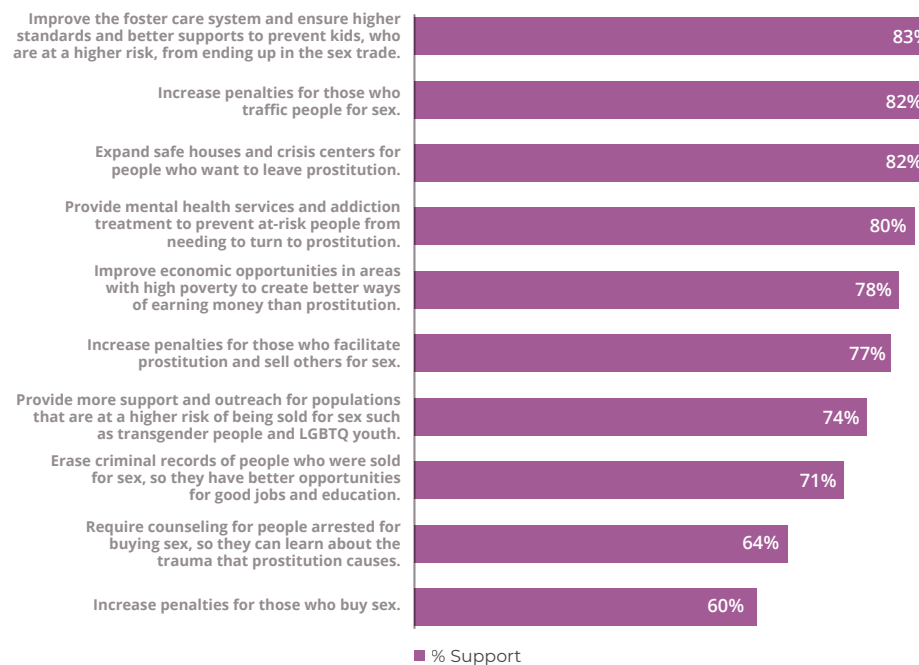
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Each policy for reducing prostitution receives strong majority support, and this support is widely shared across demographic groups.**

2. **Democrats, particularly Democratic women, exhibit consistently higher levels of support for preventive policies and policies that provide off-ramps.**

3. **Republican women exhibit consistently higher levels of support for punitive measures.**

DISCUSSION

Voters want a conversation about solutions to shrink the sex trade. There are extremely high levels of support for a variety of solutions, which in part explains why voters find messaging around proven solutions to reduce the number of women and girls in the sex trade to be the most overall convincing reason to support partial instead of full decriminalization.

BROAD SUPPORT FOR STEPS TO PREVENT AND REDUCE PROSTITUTION

Now, I'd like you to read several policies intended to reduce the number of people involved in prostitution.

Policy	% Support
Improve the foster care system and ensure higher standards and better supports to prevent kids, who are at a higher risk, from ending up in the sex trade.	83%
Increase penalties for those who traffic people for sex.	82%
Expand safe houses and crisis centers for people who want to leave prostitution.	82%
Provide mental health services and addiction treatment to prevent at-risk people from needing to turn to prostitution.	80%
Improve economic opportunities in areas with high poverty to create better ways of earning money than prostitution.	78%
Increase penalties for those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex.	77%
Provide more support and outreach for populations that are at a higher risk of being sold for sex such as transgender people and LGBTQ youth.	74%
Erase criminal records of people who were sold for sex, so they have better opportunities for good jobs and education.	71%
Require counseling for people arrested for buying sex, so they can learn about the trauma that prostitution causes.	64%
Increase penalties for those who buy sex.	60%

■ % Support

Prevention Solutions

Among preventive policies in the survey, there were two that address various populations that are at a higher risk of entering the sex trade. *Improving the foster care system to prevent high-risk kids from ending up in the sex trade* recieves the highest level of support (83% support, 61% strong support). Subgroups with higher levels of support include voters over 50 years old (88%, 67%) and Democratic women (88%, 69%).

Providing more support and outreach for transgender people and LGBTQ youth also receives high support, though less than other preventive policies (74% support, 47% strong support), with subgroups such as Conservatives and Republicans demonstrating lower levels of support, though still a majority (63% of Conservatives and 65% of Republicans) support outreach for LGBTQ youth. Subgroups with higher levels of support for this solution include Democratic men and women (82% support, 59% strongly), Independent women (81%, 50%), and Liberals (82%, 59%).

Improving economic opportunities in areas with high poverty to create better ways of earning money than prostitution receives support from 78% of voters, with 49% strongly supporting the policy. Subgroups with higher than average levels of support include Democratic women (85% support, 63% strongly), voters over 50 years old (83%, 52%), and women over 50 years old (88%, 60%).

Providing mental health services and addiction treatment to prevent at-risk people from needing to turn to prostitution also receives high-level support as a policy (80% support, 50% strongly). Once again, Democrats (86% support, 61% strongly) and women over 50 years old (87%, 61%) exhibit higher levels of support for this policy.

Solutions for Leaving the Trade

Among policies that provide off-ramps for those currently in the sex trade, *expanding safe houses and crisis centers for those who want to leave prostitution* receives high levels of support (82% support, 54% strongly) across gender lines. Subgroups with higher levels of support include Democrats (87% support, 67% strongly), and women over 50 years old (90%, 67%).

Erasing criminal records of people who were sold for sex, so that they have better opportunities for good jobs and education received majority support, though lower than some other solutions (71% support, 42% strongly). Subgroups with higher levels of support include Democrats over 50 years old (83% support, 55% strongly), Democratic women (78%, 54%), and women over 50 years old (78%, 47%).

Requiring counseling for buyers garners relatively lower levels of support (64% support, 31% strongly). Subgroups with higher than average levels of support include Democrats (71% support, 34% strongly), voters living in cities (70%, 34%), and Republican women (69%, 41%). Republican men show significantly lower levels of support (55%, 18%).

Punitive Solutions

Among the punitive measures, *increasing penalties for those who traffic people for sex* receives high support (82% support, 69% strongly), consistent across lines of gender, political party, political ideology, and region. Demographic subgroups showing higher percentages of support for increasing penalties on traffickers include Republican women (88% support, 64% strongly) and voters over 50 years old (89%, 76%).

Increasing penalties for those who facilitate prostitution is supported by more than three-quarters of voters, but more subgroup distinctions emerge. Overall support is high (77% support, 59% strongly), as with women over 50 years old (90%, 77%), and Republican women show near universal support (87%, 72%). However, there is a gender gap, with women more supportive (81% support, 65% strongly) than men (74%, 53%), and there is a pattern by age with older voters more supportive than younger voters: 18-34 years old (71% support, 46% strongly), 35-49 years old (72%, 54%), 50-64 years old (83%, 67%), and 65+ years old (84%, 71%).

Increasing penalties for those who buy sex receives significantly less support than the other punitive policies (60% support, 39% strongly). There is a significant gender gap with a large percentage of women supporting the policy (69% support, 48% strongly), while barely a majority of men agree (51%, 29%). Republican women still exhibit significantly higher than average support (72% support, 54% strongly), as do women over 50 years old (77%, 55%) and Conservatives (70%, 48%).

PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON CANDIDATE POSITIONS

Toward the end of the survey, after having an opportunity to thoroughly consider the issue, respondents were asked about how important it is to them that presidential candidates take a stance on prostitution laws, and how this issue might influence their vote in an election for a public official.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **A 55% majority of voters says it is important for presidential candidates to take a stance on prostitution laws.**

2. **More than twice as many voters (55%) report being less likely, rather than more likely (20%), to support a candidate who backs full decriminalization.**

3. **When it comes to a candidate supporting partial decriminalization, 34% say they would be "more likely" to support such a candidate, 34% would be "less likely" and 32% say it would "make no difference" or they are unsure.**

DISCUSSION

A 55% majority says it is "very" or "somewhat" important for presidential candidates to take a position on prostitution laws. Subgroups placing higher importance than average on presidential candidates taking a position include voters aged 18-34 years old (71% say "very" or "somewhat important"), Black voters (70%), Hispanic voters (64%), voters living in the city (66%), Democrats (65%), and women (62%).

VOTE IMPACT ON A CANDIDATE BACKING FULL DECRIMINALIZATION

If a candidate running for public office supports having prostitution no longer be a crime for anyone involved, including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex — Would that make you more likely to vote for that candidate or less likely to vote for that candidate?

Less Likely
55%

More Likely
20%

No Difference/Don't Know
25%
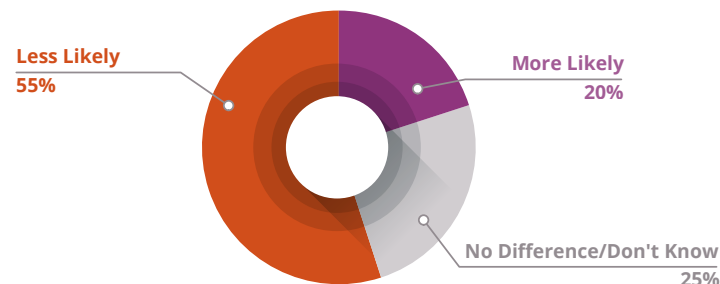
Importantly, however, more than twice as many voters report being less likely to support a candidate who backs full decriminalization.

Overall, 55% say they would be less likely to support a candidate running for public office who backs full decriminalization, 20% would be more likely, 12% say it would make no difference and 12% are not sure. By double digits in nearly every subgroup, voters are less, rather than more likely to support such a candidate.

There are significant patterns of response by gender, age, ideology, race and geography. There is a significant gender gap on this issue, with 61% of women saying they would be less likely to support a candidate backing full decriminalization, compared to just 49% of men. Women's response is driven by Republican women (72% less likely) and women over 50 years old (74%). Men's response is driven by Democratic men (43% less likely) and men under 50 years old (44%).

More Conservatives (65%) are unlikely to support such a candidate than Liberals (42%) or Hispanic voters (40%).

There is a pattern by geography with small towns and rural areas leading in being less likely to support such a candidate (62%), followed by suburbs (56%) and cities (46%).

VOTE IMPACT ON A CANDIDATE BACKING FULL DECRIMINALIZATION

If a candidate running for public office supports having prostitution no longer be a crime for anyone involved, including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex — Would that make you more likely to vote for that candidate or less likely to vote for that candidate?

	Women	Men	18-49	50+	Democrat	Ind	Rep	Liberal	Mod	Cons	White	Black	Hispanic	City	Suburb	R/ST	$0-$50k	$50k-$100k	$100k+
Less Likely	61	49	48	63	52	54	62	42	56	65	58	50	40	46	56	62	56	57	52
No Difference/Don't Know	22	28	26	24	26	30	18	29	25	22	25	21	25	22	26	24	24	21	27
More Likely	17	23	26	13	22	16	20	29	19	13	17	29	35	32	18	14	20	22	21

■ More Likely   ■ No Difference/Don't Know   ■ Less Likely
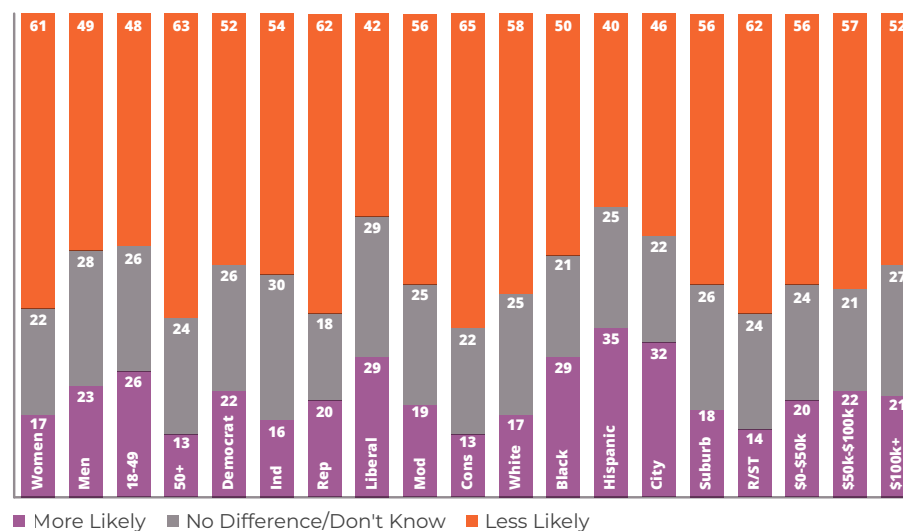
When it comes to partial decriminalization, response is evenly divided.

Overall, 34% say they would be "more likely" to support such a candidate, 34% would be "less likely" and 32% say it would "make no difference" or they are unsure.

Among every subgroup there is a significant percentage of people who are unsure about whether this issue would impact their vote, so more information may make a difference.
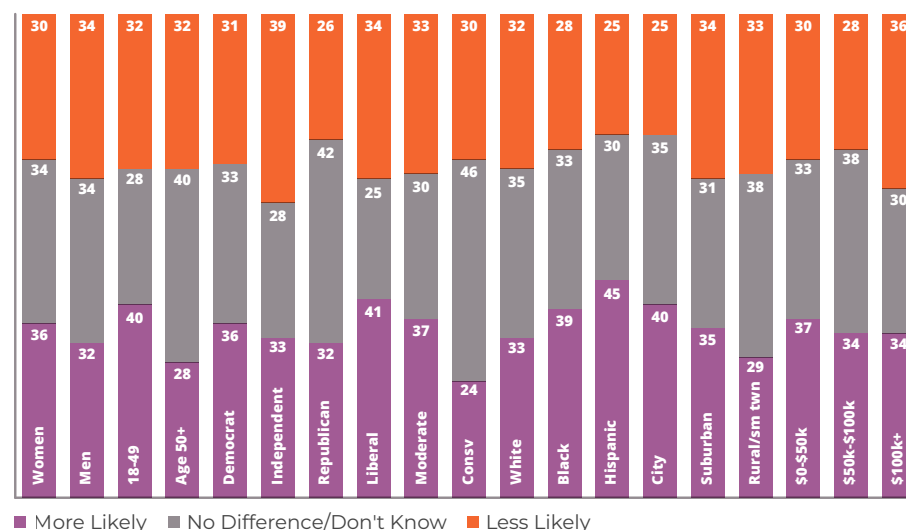
At this point, those more likely to support a candidate backing partial decriminalization include voters aged 18-34 years old (50% more likely), Hispanic voters (45%), and Black voters (39%).

There is a pattern by ideology, with Liberal voters being more likely to support such a candidate (41% more likely) than Moderates (37%) or Conservatives (24%).

Finally, there is a pattern by geography with cities being more likely to support such a candidate (40%), followed by suburbs (35%) and small towns and rural areas (29%).

VOTE IMPACT ON A CANDIDATE BACKING PARTIAL DECRIMINALIZATION

If a candidate running for public office supports having prostitution be a crime for those who buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex, while making it no longer a crime for those who sell sex — Would that make you more likely to vote for that candidate or less likely to vote for that candidate?

More Likely
34%

Less Likely
34%

No Difference/Don't Know
32%

	Women	Men	18-49	Age 50+	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Liberal	Moderate	Consv	White	Black	Hispanic	City	Suburban	Rural/sm twn	$0-$50k	$50k-$100k	$100k+
Less Likely	30	34	32	32	31	39	26	34	33	30	32	28	25	25	34	33	30	28	36
No Difference/Don't Know	34	34	28	40	33	28	42	25	30	46	35	33	30	35	31	38	33	38	30
More Likely	36	32	40	28	36	33	32	41	37	24	33	39	45	40	35	29	37	34	34

■ More Likely   ■ No Difference/Don't Know   ■ Less Likely
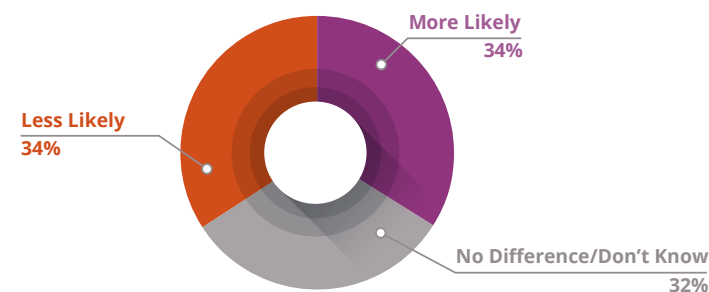
RESPONDENT COMMENTARY

Since this is such a complex issue and one that some people feel quite passionate about, the survey included a last, open-end question for people to voice anything they wanted about the topic.

An analysis of the open-ended responses[1] provided by 144 respondents suggests that people are highly interested in the topic and conflicted about the best path forward. Some policy stances (full criminalization) are familiar and easy to understand, while others (full decriminalization and partial decriminalization) are likely newer, less familiar ideas for most. Some respondents propose punishing only third-party sellers. While this policy stance is not formally articulated in the survey, voters express these sentiments through high support for increasing penalties on traffickers and third-party facilitators as preventive policy measures, and relatively lower support for increased penalties on buyers.

> *"It should be illegal and there should [be] much heavier enforcement and heavier and stricter penalties imposed for all involved except for the women/anyone who is the merchandise being sold for sex who are victims, there should be no penalties handed out to the victims and instead help given, and whatever measures are necessary including laws to make sure that help is given; also human trafficking needs to be brought into the light with similar [measures] tak[en]."*

> *"The proper choice was not offered. It should only be a crime for those who sell others for sex."*

A few respondents used this opportunity to make a point about sex trafficking. The survey deliberately avoided using the phrase in the policy descriptions to avoid conflating prostitution with child sex trafficking, for example. However, this omission caused several respondents to call out their strong opposition to sex trafficking. Some believe that stopping sex trafficking is the more pressing issue, and used this space to talk about it since it wasn't mentioned elsewhere in the survey. Within this group, some respondents conflate prostitution as a whole with sex trafficking/child trafficking.[2]

> *"Sex trafficking is all about prostitution."*

> *"The survey doesn't seem to include provisions for those who might be prostituted against their will those people should not be prosecuted."*

> *"The focus needs to be on eliminating child crimes associated with human trafficking. Legal prostitution frees up investigators to focus on real victims."*

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1 Open-ended responses are quoted as written with the exception of bracketed sections, which fix typos to provide more clarity.

2 The U.S. government defines sex trafficking as a commercial sex act induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age. Source: National Institute of Justice

Many wanted to distinguish between those who "choose" this life and those who are "forced" into the life ("the life" refers to those who are in the sex trade). Issue advocates will caution that the line between choice and free will is not so clear. All survey respondents want to avoid penalizing those who are not in the sex trade due to their own free will. Some want to hold "choosers" accountable for their actions, while others believe they should be free to do what they want. Respondents sometimes struggled with how the policies would allow for a distinction between these two groups, sometimes demonstrating seeming inconsistencies in response. For example, a person who opposes full decriminalization, but supports partial decriminalization and full legalization, may be trying to find ways to protect women and sort out the "choosers."

> *"Complicated issue. If prostitution occurs between two consenting adults, it should be legal."*

> *"I think that the women and men forced into prostitution are often victims and should not be prosecuted. However there are adults who choose that as a way to make money and those should be penalized."*

> *"I hope that there can be a solution to stop prostitution. It [is] sad that sometimes people think this is the only option. I believe anyone that is involved should be held legally responsible, the only exception is if someone was forced against there [sic] will."*

Lastly, some used this as an opportunity to discuss their personal experience. One in five survey respondents report some personal experience with the issue, including 13% who report they had been a seller, 10% a buyer, and 4% "a pimp, madam or manager." (Multiple responses were allowed.) Of the 144 open-ended responses, only two discuss personal experience as sellers.

> *"I was a prostitute for a while. It is hard work, sometimes dangerous, sometimes just plain gross. It is empowering and demeaning at the same time, to feel so wanted but so used. It taught me a lot about men, however."*

> *"I was once in prostitution and i think if you [force] people u should be in jail."*

> *"I worked as a juvenile probation officer during my career and saw firsthand the lure and the devastation associated with sex trafficking."*

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive survey provides a significant contribution to understanding American attitudes toward prostitution and the steps voters support to address the issue. This research finds:

— Americans want to shrink prostitution.

— They support a wide range of solutions to prevent and reduce prostitution.

— A majority opposes fully decriminalizing prostitution, while just as many support having it remain a crime.

— At the same time, people are open to partially decriminalizing prostitution—a plurality supports the idea initially, and support grows as people learn more.

— By nearly a 3-to-1 ratio, voters say they are less, rather than more likely to support a candidate who backs full decriminalization; vote impact is mixed about candidates backing partial decriminalization.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted by the Topos Partnership and Keating Research, and supported by the NoVo Foundation.

The survey was conducted online from January 10-16, 2020. A total of 1,000 registered voters were interviewed and were screened to ensure that they are likely to vote in November 2020. The demographic mix of survey respondents reflects the mix of registered voters in the US. The survey's margin of error is +/-3.1% for the full sample, with higher tolerances for subgroups.

ABOUT TOPOS

Topos has as its mission to explore and ultimately transform the landscape of public understanding where public interest issues play out. Our approach is based on the premise that while it is possible to achieve short-term victories on issues through a variety of strategies, real change depends on a fundamental shift in public understanding. Topos was created to bring together the range of expertise needed to understand existing issue dynamics, explore possibilities for creating new issue understanding, develop a proven course of action, and arm advocates with new tools to win support.

topos

For more information: www.topospartnership.com
Or email us: team@topospartnership.com

ABOUT KEATING RESEARCH

Keating Research, Inc. was established in 2010 and in a short period of time has established itself as a leading survey research firm. Keating has worked in survey research for the past 25 years where he has conducted thousands of successful survey research projects of various state and local issues including education, energy, water, transportation and growth issues. Keating is well regarded in the field for accurate and thoughtful research.

KEATING
RESEARCH

Keating Research www.keatingresearch.com

APPENDIX

1. Are you at least 18 years old and registered to vote?

Yes 100%

No .... **— Terminate**

2. What state do you live in?

Regions based on state identified.

Northeast 20%

Midwest 24%

South 34%

West 23%

3. What is your political affiliation?

Please select one.

Democrat 38%

Republican 31%

Green Party .... *%

Libertarian Party 1%

Independent 26%

No Party Affiliation 3%

*% denotes less than 1%

4. What are the chances that you will vote in the November 2020 election for President and Congress? **Please select one.**

Definitely vote 87%

Probably vote 8%

50-50 chances 4%

Probably not vote .... **— Terminate**

5. Just to be sure we are representing everybody, do you happen to come from a Hispanic or Latino/a background?

Yes 15%

No 84%

Prefer not to say 1%

6. What is your race?

Hispanic / Latino/a 8%

White 74%

Black / African American 12%

Asian 4%

Native American / American Indian 1%

Other .... *%

Prefer not to say 1%

7. What is your gender?

Male 48%

Female 52%

Prefer to self-describe .... *%

Prefer not to say .... *%

8. What year were you born?

Age categories based on birth year identified.

Age 18 – 24 .... 9%

Age 25 – 44 .... 34%

Age 45 – 64 .... 37%

Age 65+ 18%

Prefer not to say 1%

9. What is the last grade or level of school you have completed? **Please select one.**

Did not finish high school 1%

High school graduate 27%

Some college 34%

College graduate 27%

Postgraduate courses or graduate degree 11%

Prefer not to say .... *%

PLEASE CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS ABOUT PROSTITUTION AND THE LAWS SURROUNDING BUYING AND SELLING SEX.

10. How much prostitution would you say there is in your city or town - a lot, a little or not very much at all?
Please select one.

A lot 19%
A little 28%
Not very much at all 28%

Don't know / Not sure 25%

11. In general, do you think it is best for your community to adopt policies and laws that shrink prostitution, keep it about the same, or grow prostitution?
Please select one.

Shrink 53%
Keep about the same...............................22%
Grow 9%

Don't know / Not sure 16%

SOME POLITICIANS ARE CONSIDERING DIFFERENT POLICIES TO ADDRESS PROSTITUTION. NOW I'D LIKE YOU TO CONSIDER THREE DIFFERENT POLICY APPROACHES.

12. Do you support or oppose – having prostitution **be a crime for everyone involved,** including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex?
Please select one.

SUPPORT **59%**
OPPOSE **29%**

Strongly support 36%
Somewhat support 23%
Somewhat oppose 16%
Strongly oppose 13%

Don't know / Not sure 12%

13. Do you support or oppose – having prostitution **be a crime for those who buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex,** while making it **no longer a crime for those who sell sex?**
Please select one.

SUPPORT **44%**
OPPOSE **40%**

Strongly support 25%
Somewhat support 19%
Somewhat oppose 18%
Strongly oppose 22%
Don't know / Not sure 16%

14. Do you support or oppose - having prostitution **no longer be a crime for anyone involved,** including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex?
Please select one.

SUPPORT **30%**
OPPOSE **57%**

Strongly support 11%
Somewhat support 19%
Somewhat oppose 15%
Strongly oppose 42%

Don't know / Not sure 13%

15. Suppose your local government was considering this issue. Which policy do you think would be the best for your local government to enact?

Randomize answer choices.

Please select one.

Having prostitution **be a crime for everyone involved,** including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex. 45%

Having prostitution **be a crime for those who buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex, while making it no longer a crime for those who sell sex.** 22%

Having prostitution **no longer be a crime for anyone involved,** including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex. 18%

Don't know / Not sure 14%

16. And which policy do you think would be the **worst** for your local government to enact?

Randomize the remaining answer choices.

Please select one.

Having prostitution **be a crime for everyone involved,** including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and others for sex. 21%

Having prostitution **be a crime for those who buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex, while making it no longer a crime for those who sell sex.**..18%

Having prostitution **no longer be a crime for anyone involved,** including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex. 46%

Don't know / Not sure 15%

17. Do you support or oppose – having prostitution be **a fully legal, licensed and regulated industry? Please select one.**

SUPPORT **38%**

OPPOSE **51%**

Strongly support 15%
Somewhat support 23%
Somewhat oppose 13%
Strongly oppose 38%

Don't know / Not sure 11%

6

Now, I'd like you to read several policies intended to **reduce the number of people involved in prostitution.** After you read each one, please indicate if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose each policy.

Randomize the order of the items on the list.

Policies Ranked by Level of Support	SUPPORT	OPPOSE	Support	Somewhat Support	Somewhat Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Don't know Not Sure
23. Increase penalties for those who traffic people for sex.	82%	10%	69%	13%	6%	5%	8%
18. Improve the foster care system and ensure higher standards and better supports to prevent kids, who are at a higher risk, from ending up in the sex trade.	83%	9%	61%	22%	5%	3%	8%
24. Increase penalties for those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex.	77%	13%	59%	18%	9%	5%	9%
22. Expand safe houses and crisis centers for people who want to leave prostitution.	82%	10%	54%	28%	6%	4%	8%
27. Provide mental health services and addiction treatment to prevent at-risk people from needing to turn to prostitution.	80%	12%	50%	29%	8%	4%	9%
19. Improve economic opportunities in areas with high poverty to create better ways of earning money than prostitution.	78%	11%	49%	29%	7%	4%	10%
20. Provide more support and outreach for populations that are at a higher risk of being sold for sex such as transgender people and LGBTQ youth.	74%	14%	47%	27%	8%	5%	12%
21. Erase criminal records of people who were sold for sex, so they have better opportunities for good jobs and education.	71%	17%	42%	28%	9%	8%	12%
26. Require counseling for people arrested for buying sex, so they can learn about the trauma that prostitution causes.	64%	21%	31%	33%	12%	9%	15%
25. Increase penalties for those who buy sex.	60%	27%	39%	21%	14%	13%	13%

28. Thinking ahead to next year's election, how important is it to you for presidential candidates to take a position on prostitution laws?

Please select one.

Very important 25%

Somewhat important 30%

Not very important 25%

Not at all important 11%

Don't know / Not sure 10%

Rotate the order of the statements in Q29 – Q33 and the statements in Q34 – Q36.

Now, I'd like you to read some statements that people have made for why we should protect from legal penalty those who sell sex, but make it a crime for those buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex.

After you read each statement, please indicate if it is very convincing, somewhat convincing, not very convincing or not at all convincing.

Randomize order of statements, display one statement at a time.

Statements Ranked by Persuasiveness	VERY / SOMEWHAT	NOT VERY / NOT AT ALL	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	Not at all
29. Prostitution is a harmful lifestyle that causes Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression among those who are sold for sex, and leaves many unable to maintain healthy intimate relationships. If there are no criminal penalties for those who buy sex and those who sell others for sex, then demand for prostitution will increase, putting more people in harm's way.	73%	27%	39%	34%	20%	7%
Ask Q32A on split form A: n=500. 32A. If it is no longer a crime to sell others for sex, then we will see increased sex trafficking, including child trafficking, and it will be harder for police to arrest child traffickers, since their activities will be masked by prostitution that is not illegal.	71%	29%	42%	30%	18%	10%
Ask Q32B on split form B: n=500. 32B. If it is no longer a crime to sell others for sex, then we will see increased sex trafficking, especially among our most marginalized and already exploited communities.	69%	31%	44%	25%	20%	11%
30. We have proven solutions to reduce the number of women and girls in the sex trade. We know what it takes to close on-ramps to prostitution, like improving the foster care system. We also know how to build more exit ramps for those who want to leave prostitution, like clearing their criminal records, increasing economic opportunities and providing safe places to go when they are ready to leave the sex trade.	75%	25%	31%	45%	19%	6%
31. If it is no longer a crime to sell others for sex, then the sex trade will grow because exploiters will push for bigger markets to meet the bigger demand – leading to brothels in our local communities and sex tourism in our cities. We want and deserve better for our communities so we should be taking steps shrink the sex trade.	67%	33%	36%	32%	21%	12%
33. Prostitution is not a "victimless crime" - it causes psychological and emotional trauma to the women involved. Fully decriminalizing it will normalize prostitution and imply it is just a job like any other, just like being a teacher, or nurse, or waitress and that's simply not the case.	66%	34%	33%	33%	21%	13%

Rotate the order of the statements in Q29 – Q33 and the statements in Q34 – Q36 and record which one comes first.

Now, I'd like you to read some statements that some people have made in support of proposals for having prostitution no longer be a crime for anyone involved, including those who buy sex, those who are being sold for sex, and those who facilitate or sell others for sex.

After you read each statement, please indicate if it is very convincing, somewhat convincing, not very convincing or not at all convincing.

Randomize order of statements, display one statement at a time.

Ranked by Persuasiveness	VERY / SOMEWHAT	NOT VERY / NOT AT ALL	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	Not at all
36. Prostitution can be physically dangerous. Making it legal will bring it out of the shadows so that people can be safer and ask police for help when they need to.	56%	44%	22%	34%	25%	19%
34. This is about choice. Society shouldn't tell a person what to do with their own body, and that includes whether or not a person wants to sell or buy sex.	45%	55%	19%	27%	26%	28%
35. Sex work is a job, and for some people it is the best option to earn a living. Keeping sex work illegal makes it even harder for people to make ends meet.	40%	60%	13%	28%	28%	32%

37. Based on the information you read today, in general, do you think it is best for your community to adopt policies and laws that shrink prostitution, keep it about the same, or grow prostitution?

Please select one.

Shrink 56%

Keep about the same..................................21%

Grow 9%

Don't know / Not sure 13%

Now I'd like you to reconsider each of the three policies on prostitution. **Randomize the order of Q38 – Q40.**

Show each question 38 - 40 on separate screen.

38. Do you support or oppose – **having prostitution be a crime for everyone involved,** including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex?
Please select one.

SUPPORT	**59%**
OPPOSE	**31%**

Strongly support	37%
Somewhat support	22%
Somewhat oppose	17%
Strongly oppose	14%
Don't know / Not sure	9%

39. Do you support or oppose – having prostitution **be a crime for those who buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex,** while making **it no longer a crime for those who sell sex?**
Please select one.

SUPPORT	**52%**
OPPOSE	**36%**

Strongly support	28%
Somewhat support	24%
Somewhat oppose	18%
Strongly oppose	18%
Don't know / Not sure	13%

40. Do you support or oppose - having prostitution **no longer be a crime for anyone involved,** including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex?
Please select one.

SUPPORT	**25%**
OPPOSE	**66%**

Strongly support	10%
Somewhat support	15%
Somewhat oppose	16%
Strongly oppose	50%
Don't know / Not sure	9%

41. Now please reconsider the three different policies. Which one do you think would be the best for your local government to enact?
Randomize answer choices.
Please select one.

Having prostitution **be a crime for everyone involved,** including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex. 45%

Having prostitution **be a crime for those who buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex,** while making it **no longer a crime for those who sell sex.** 25%

Having prostitution **no longer be a crime for anyone involved**, including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex. 18%

Don't know / Not sure 13%

42. Do you support or oppose – having prostitution be **a fully legal, licensed and regulated industry?**
Please select one.

SUPPORT	**36%**
OPPOSE	**55%**

Strongly support	14%
Somewhat support	22%
Somewhat oppose	12%
Strongly oppose	43%
Don't know / Not sure	9%

Rotate the order of questions 43 and 44. Show Q43 and Q44 separately.

43. If a candidate running for public office supports having prostitution **be a crime for those who buy sex and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex,** while making it **no longer a crime for those who sell sex** — Would that make you more likely to vote for that candidate or less likely to vote for that candidate?
Please select one.

MORE LIKELY **34%**
LESS LIKELY **34%**

Much More likely to vote for that candidate 14%
Somewhat More likely to vote
for that candidate 20%
Somewhat Less likely to vote
for that candidate 15%
Much Less likely to vote for that candidate 19%
Would make no difference in vote 17%
Don't know / not sure 15%

44. If a candidate running for public office supports having prostitution **no longer be a crime for anyone involved,** including those who buy sex, those who sell sex, and those who facilitate prostitution and sell others for sex — Would that make you more likely to vote for that candidate or less likely to vote for that candidate?
Please select one.

MORE LIKELY **20%**
LESS LIKELY **55%**

Much More likely to vote for that candidate 8%
Somewhat More likely to vote for that candidate 12%
Somewhat Less likely to vote for that candidate 15%
Much Less likely to vote for that candidate 41%
Would make no difference in vote 12%

Don't know / not sure 12%

45. As far as you know, do you know anyone personally who has engaged in prostitution? **Your response will be held strictly confidential.**
Please select all that apply.

TOTAL Yes **21%**

Yes, as a seller 13%
Yes, as a buyer 10%
Yes, as a pimp, madam or manager 4%
No 77%
Prefer not to say 3%

46. Do you have any additional thoughts or personal experiences on this topic that you would like to share? **Your response will be held strictly confidential. Please enter your response in the box below.** Optional

47. Thinking a little more about you, which income range comes closest to your household income?
Please select one.

We understand that this is personal information, but we assure you that this survey is being completed for research purposes only and that all responses given will remain strictly confidential.

Under $25,000 ....15%
$25,000 to less than $50,000 ....22%
$50,000 to less than $75,000 ....19%
$75,000 to less than $100,000 ....16%
$100,000 to less than $150,000 .... 13%
$150,000 or more 10%
Don't Know / Not Sure 1%
Prefer not to say 4%

48. Thinking about your approach to political issues, would you describe yourself as liberal, moderate, or conservative?
Please select one.

Liberal 24%
Moderate 44%
Conservative 30%
Other 1%

49. Which of the following best describes the area where you live…a large city, a suburb near a large city, a small city or town, or a rural area?
Please select one.

Large city 23%
Suburb near a large city 43%
A town or small city 19%
A rural area 15%
Don't Know / Refused ....*%

50. What is your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual / Straight 92%
Homosexual / Gay / Lesbian 3%
Bisexual 3%
Queer ....*%
Prefer not to say 2%

*% denotes less than 1%