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# **Texans' Confidence in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems in Texas: General Report**



## ***2007 Texas Crime Poll***

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## Executive Summary

This survey represents the 37<sup>th</sup> statewide public opinion survey completed under the auspices of the Criminal Justice Center's Survey Research Program at Sam Houston State University. The Criminal Justice Center was established by the Texas Legislature in 1963 when it passed House Resolution 469. This *General Report* is prepared as a resource document summarizing the major results of the *2007 Texas Crime Poll*. Several items included in this year's survey focused upon citizens' confidence in different components of the criminal and juvenile justice systems in Texas. Some of the items had been included in prior Texas Crime Polls, and, where possible, comparisons in responses across these years are made.

In addition to the items reported upon in this *General Report*, the *2007 Texas Crime Poll* included questions focusing on issues associated with the enforcement of immigration laws, drugs and drug law enforcement, and crimes against the elderly. Separate "Special Reports" focusing on these issues are forthcoming. Upon completion, these "Special Reports" will be posted at the Survey Research Program's general home-page (<http://www.cjcenter.org/srp>).

The following summarizes the major findings reported in this *General Report*.

- More Texans consider crime, drugs, and illegal immigration to be the most important problems facing them at the local level today than in 2004, and Texans are more concerned with illegal immigration at the local level today than they were in 2004.
- When asked to identify the most important problem facing the State, illegal immigration, drugs, and education were the three most common concerns mentioned by the 2007 respondents.
- When asked to identify the most important problem facing the Nation, the three most frequently mentioned problems in 2007 were the war in Iraq (18%), government (15%), and national security/terrorism (14%).
- Overall, Texans in 2007 report considerably lower levels of confidence in the criminal and juvenile justice systems and their components than they did in 1998.
- In 2007, only 58% of the respondents expressed confidence in the adult criminal justice system compared to 63% in 1998. Similarly, in 1998 49% of the respondents had "a great deal" or "some" confidence in the juvenile justice system at large compared to only 45% of the 2007 sample.
- There was an 11% decrease in the number of respondents expressing confidence in the juvenile parole system in 2007 (30%) compared with 1998 (41%). The next largest drop was an 8% reduction in the number of respondents expressing confidence in adult and juvenile probation systems.
- In both 2004 and 2007 more than half of the respondents to the surveys report having confidence in the law enforcement and judicial components of the system. Fewer than half of the respondents in both years expressed confidence in the different components associated with community-based supervision programs, including probation and parole components at the adult and juvenile levels.
- In both 2004 and 2007, those respondents reporting that they were familiar with the different components of the systems were generally more likely to report having confidence in those components.

- Contrary to patterns reported in 1998, considerably fewer 2007 respondents who reported having had contact with the components of the systems also reported confidence in them. This is most remarkable among those respondents reporting that they had some form of contact with the community-based components of both the adult and juvenile justice systems. In 2007, only 38% of those respondents reporting having had contact with their local adult community services divisions reported having confidence in them, compared with 77% of similar respondents 1998. Similarly, in 2007 only 31% of those respondents who had some sort of contact with their local juvenile community services divisions reported having confidence in them, compared to 70% of the 1998 sample.
- Over 50% of those respondents participating in the 2007 survey who had experienced some sort of contact with the criminal and juvenile justice systems reported having "little" or "no" confidence in them. Fifty-one percent reported little or no confidence in the criminal justice system, and 59% reported little or no confidence in the juvenile justice system.
- In both 2001 and 2007 Texans had more confidence in DNA experts, forensic pathologists, and forensic "crime scene recreation experts" and lower levels of confidence in testimony presented by criminal profilers, psychiatrists, and psychologists. In both years, the lowest levels of confidence were reported in experts testifying about sanity/insanity, competency, and future dangerousness.
- In both 2001 and 2007 over 60% of the respondents to the surveys reported having a "great deal" of confidence in DNA experts, and between 49 and 50 percent reported having a "great deal" of confidence in forensic pathologists and forensic ballistics experts. Conversely, only about 10% of the respondents in both years reported having similar levels of confidence in psychiatric and/or psychological testimony.
- The level of confidence in Texas' death penalty system is modest at best. Only about a quarter of the respondents in either 2001 or 2007 expressed "a lot of confidence" in the system's ability to insure that innocent people are not executed (27% in 2001 and 23% in 1997).
- About a third of the respondents in both 2001 and 2007 reported having "little" or "no" confidence in each of the different areas of the death penalty system leaving about 40% expressing "some" confidence in the system. In almost every case, respondents in 2007 reported lower levels of confidence in the death penalty system than did the 2001 respondents.
- 74% of the participants in the *2007 Texas Crime Poll* support the death penalty for the crime of murder. Only 18% oppose its use, and 8% are uncertain about their position on the death penalty.
- 79% of those respondents who initially supported the death penalty said they would support a law generalizing that sanction to repeat violent child abusers. Ten percent would oppose such legislation, and another 11% indicated that they didn't know whether or not they would support the death penalty for repeat child abusers.
- Fifty-six percent of all Texans support generalizing the death penalty to repeat violent child-sex abusers while 27% oppose such legislation, and the remaining 17% are uncertain about their support for such legislation.

## Introduction

This survey represents the 37<sup>th</sup> statewide public opinion survey completed under the auspices of the Criminal Justice Center's Survey Research Program at Sam Houston State University. The Criminal Justice Center was established by the Texas Legislature in 1963 when it passed House Resolution 469. This resolution called for Sam Houston State University to work in collaboration with the Texas Department of Corrections to establish a program of excellence with four objectives:

- 1) establish degree programs for individuals seeking careers in criminal justice;
- 2) provide continuing education programs for professionals already employed in the field of criminal justice;
- 3) conduct research on the problems of crime and the administration of justice; and
- 4) provide technical assistance to criminal justice agencies.

The *2007 Texas Crime Poll* and all activities conducted under the auspices of the Criminal Justice Center's Survey Research Program help to fulfill the third of these objectives by reporting information on public opinions regarding criminal justice and related issues. The first *Texas Crime Poll* was completed in 1977, and surveys have been repeated annually since that date with multiple surveys completed in several of these years. Copies of the Final Reports for each of these surveys are available for review at the Center's web-site located at <http://www.cjcenter.org/srp/txpi.html>. The general purpose of these surveys is to provide legislators, public officials, and Texas residents with a reliable source of information about citizens' opinions and attitudes concerning crime and criminal justice related topics.

This *General Report* is prepared as a resource document summarizing the major results of the *2007 Texas Crime Poll*. Several items included in this year's survey focused upon citizens' confidence in different components of the criminal and juvenile justice systems in Texas. Some of the items had been included in the *1998 Texas Crime Poll*, and others had been included in the *2000 Texas Crime Poll* allowing for a comparison of how Texans' attitudes about these issues has changed over time. In addition to the items reported upon in this General Report, the 2007 Texas Crime Poll included questions focusing on issues associated with the enforcement of immigration laws, drugs and drug law enforcement, and crimes against the elderly. Separate "Special Reports" focusing on these issues are forthcoming. Upon completion, these "Special Reports" will be posted at the Survey Research Program's general home-page (<http://www.cjcenter.org/srp>).

A general discussion of the survey's methodology and a description of the respondents are followed by a discussion of responses to several questions focusing on Texans' confidence in the criminal and juvenile justice systems and their components. Where possible, comparisons are made between the responses to the 2007 questions and responses to previously published surveys. *Ad hoc* arrangements can be made for further analysis and interpretation of findings. Please contact Dr. Dennis R. Longmire at the Survey Research Program for further assistance.

## SECTION 1: The 2007 Texas Crime Poll and characteristics of the sample

The 2007 Texas Crime Poll involved a statewide postal survey designed and completed by the Criminal Justice Center's Survey Research Program at Sam Houston State University. In January of 2007, surveys were sent via mail to 2,824 households, and 332 were returned completed. The overall response rate was 11.76%.

The 2007 survey was able to increase the representation of Hispanic residents by over-sampling in census tracts with disproportionately high Hispanic populations. To do this, the survey mailing list was divided into two equally-sized groups. The first group included a general sample of 1,500 Texas residents randomly selected from published telephone directories. The second group consisted of 1,500 Texas residents living in neighborhoods identified as having high levels of Hispanic residents. More detailed information concerning the sampling and data collection processes can be found at [http://www.cjcenter.org/srp/2007/tech\\_report.html](http://www.cjcenter.org/srp/2007/tech_report.html).

The figures presented in Table 1.1 show the gender, ethnicity/race, and age of the participants in the 2007 survey. Also included in this table are figures showing the proportion of respondents broken down into sub-groups based on their education, political preference, and religious preference. The survey also included descriptive information about the nature of each respondent's community size, internet usage, primary news source, and television viewing habits. The summary data in this *General Report* are only broken down by the sub-groups shown in Table 1.1. Further sub-group analysis can be completed using the available data-set. The size of this year's sample allows general frequencies reported to fall within a margin of error of (+/-) 4.3%. Table 1.1 also presents estimates of each sub-group's representation statewide. Caution should be exercised when interpreting the results of this survey because the sample under-represents those in several sub-groups, including women and Black residents. The sample also over-represents males and older Texans. Survey research focusing on crime and justice-related issues often finds significant differences across these sub-groups, therefore, before formal tests of significance for cross-group comparisons are conducted, the present data set should be weighted to better approximate the different sub-group's representation in the statewide population.



**TABLE 1.1**  
**PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS FROM DIFFERENT GROUPS OF TEXANS PARTICIPATING IN THE**  
**2007 TEXAS CRIME POLL (N=332)**

Total Sample	Texas Crime Poll (2007)	Statewide Estimates
	%	%
<b>Gender*</b>		
Male	61	49.9
Female	39	50.1
<b>Race/Ethnicity*</b>		
White	59	49
Black	4	11
Hispanic	30	36
Other	7	4
<b>Age*</b>		
18 - 25	2	17
26 - 33	6	16
34 - 41	8	16
42 - 49	14	16
50 - 57	19	13
58 +	51	21
<b>Education*</b>		
Less than high school	7	24
High school graduate	14	25
Some college	36	28
College or more	43	23
<b>Household Income*</b>		
< \$15,000	10	17
\$15,001 - \$30,000	18	20
\$30,000 - \$60,000	33	27
> \$60,000	35	36
<b>Political Preference**</b>		
Republican	37	39
Democrat	36	30
Independent	15	31
Other	11	<1
<b>Religious Preference***</b>		
Protestant	38	64
Catholic	34	34
Jewish	2	1
Other	20	1

**SOURCES FOR STATEWIDE ESTIMATES:**

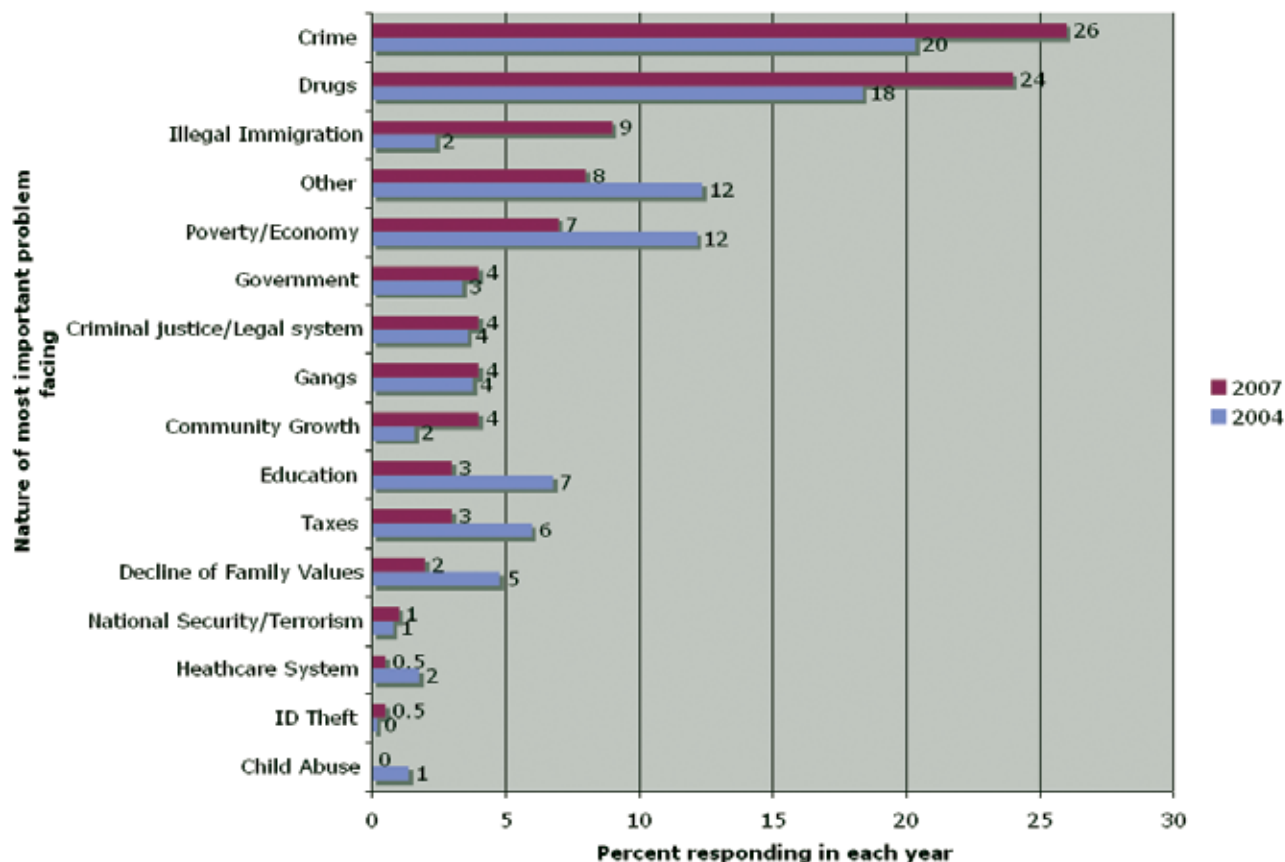
\* Texas State Data Center and Office of the State Demographer (at <http://txsdc.utsa.edu/tpepp/txpopest.php> last visited April 14, 2007). Statewide estimates for various sub-groups drawn from multiple sites.

\*\* Percent of votes received by each party in Texas' 2006 Gubernatorial election. Figures drawn from "Race Summary Report 2006 General Election 11/7/06" at <http://elections.sos.state.tx.us/elchist.exe>. Last accessed April 14, 2007.

\*\*\* Membership in different religious groups in Texas, 2000 estimates. Extracted from the Texas Almanac 2006-2007, available on-line at <http://www.texasalmanac.com/religion/>. Last visited April 14, 2007.

## SECTION 2: Most important problems facing local communities, the State, and the Nation

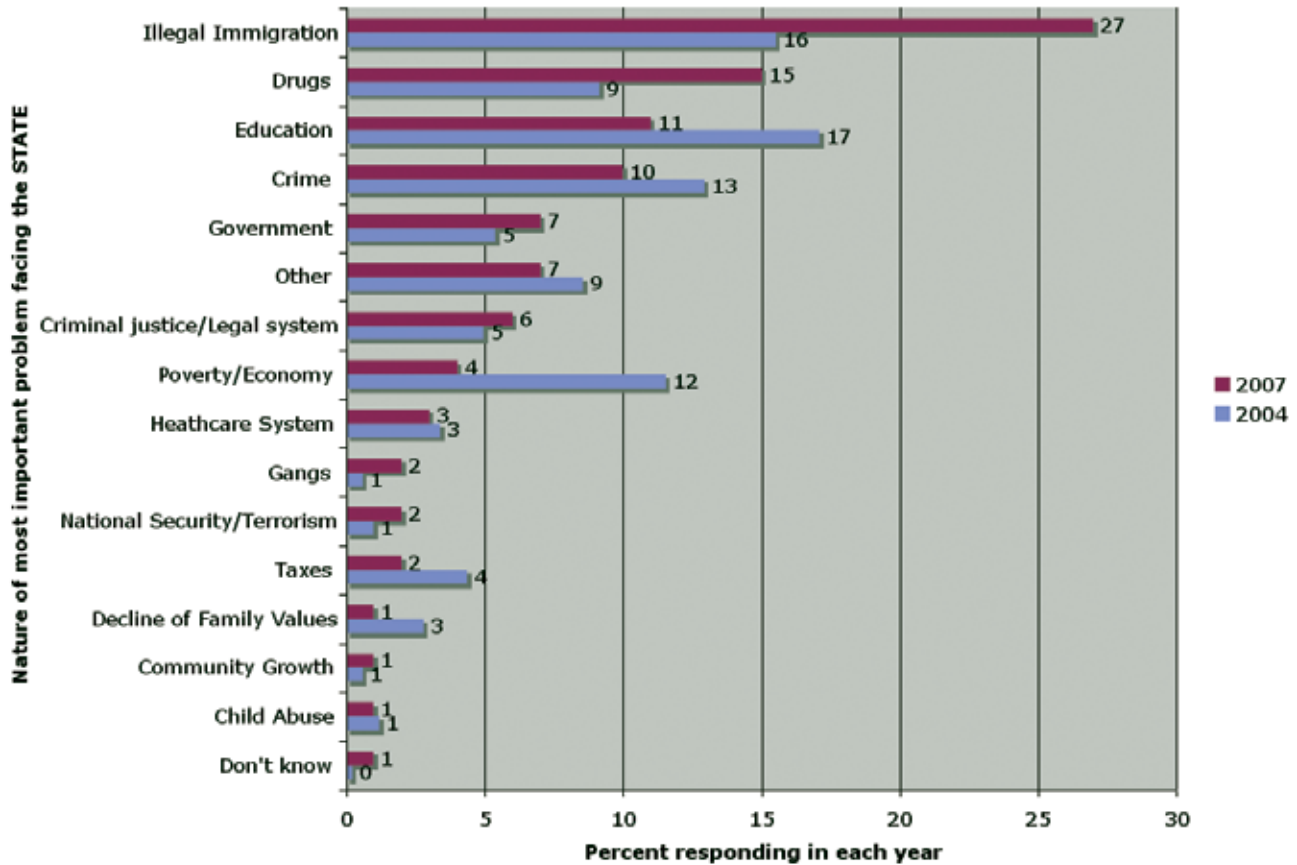
The 2007 Texas Crime Poll included questions designed to allow respondents to identify what they consider to be the most important problems facing their local communities, the State of Texas, and the Nation by asking respondents to answer three open-ended questions “What do you consider to be the most important problem facing... (your local community, the State, and the Nation?).” For purposes of analysis, the answers to these questions were coded into several different categories corresponding to the responses given to this same series of open-ended questions included on the 2004 Texas Crime Poll. The Figures 2.1 – 2.3 show the percent of respondents mentioning each problem during each of the years. In all figures, the problems are listed in order of the frequency they were mentioned by the 2007 respondents.



**FIGURE 2.1**  
**MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM FACING LOCAL COMMUNITY 2004 vs. 2007**

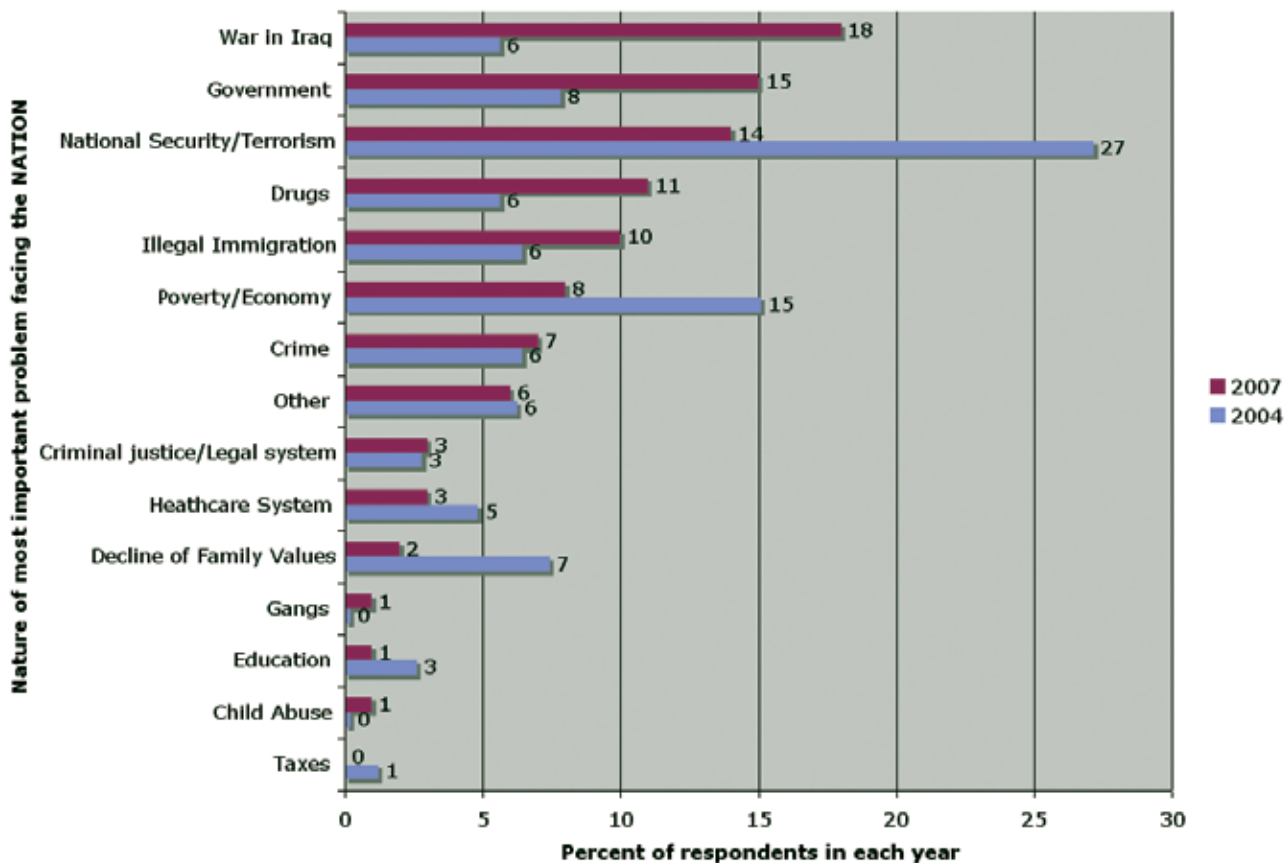
Figure 2.1 shows that more Texans consider crime, drugs, and illegal immigration to be the most important problems facing them at the local level today than in 2004. It is also apparent that considerably more Texans are concerned with illegal immigration at the local level today than they were in 2004. Crime was the most frequently mentioned problem in both years with 26% of the 2007 respondents and 20% of the 2004 respondents identifying a crime-related issue as the most important problem facing their local community. In both years, drug-related issues were the second most frequently mentioned problems facing local communities, and in 2007 illegal immigration was the third most frequently mentioned problem at the local level with 9% of the respondents identifying it today compared with only 2% of the 2004 sample.

When asked to identify the most important problem facing the State, illegal immigration, drugs, and education were the three most common concerns mentioned by the 2007 respondents. Concerns about illegal immigration at the State level were mentioned by 27% of the respondents to the 2007 survey compared with only 20% of the 2004 respondents. Drug-related problems were mentioned by only 9% of the 2004 respondents compared with 15% of the 2007 respondents.



**FIGURE 2.2**  
**MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM FACING THE STATE 2004 vs. 2007**

When asked to identify the most important problem facing the Nation, the three most frequently mentioned problems in 2007 were the war in Iraq (18%), government (15%), and national security/terrorism (14%). In 2004, the three most frequently mentioned problems at the national level were national security/terrorism (27%), poverty/economy (15%), and government (8%). Considerably fewer respondents to this year’s survey mentioned national security or terrorism as the most important problem facing the Nation. Crime and concerns about the criminal justice/legal system were identified as the most important problem facing the Nation by about 10% of the respondents in both years.



**FIGURE 2.3**  
**MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM FACING THE NATION 2004 vs. 2007**



### SECTION 3: Confidence in the criminal/juvenile justice system and its components

In 1998, Texans were asked to identify how much confidence they had in Texas' criminal and juvenile justice systems and each of their components. The same questions were included in the *2007 Texas Crime Poll* in an effort to ascertain whether levels of confidence in the systems had changed. In both years, respondents were asked the general question "How much confidence do you have in each of the following components of the criminal/juvenile justice system?" followed by a list of eight distinct components of the adult and juvenile justice systems. Respondents were also asked to report how much confidence they had in the adult and juvenile justice systems at large. In each survey they were asked to select one of five options: "A great deal of confidence," "Some confidence," "Little confidence," "No confidence," and "Don't know." Table 3.1 reports the distribution of respondents to these questions collapsed in to three levels, those reporting "a great deal" or

**TABLE 3.1**  
**CONFIDENCE IN THE COMPONENTS OF THE CRIMINAL/JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN TEXAS 1998**  
**(N = 584) AND 2007 (N = 332)**

Justice System Components	"A great deal" or "Some" confidence		% Change	"Little" or "No" Confidence		% Change	Don't know		% Change
	1998	2007		1998	2007		1998	2007	
<b>Law Enforcement</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
Local Police Dept.	83	80	-3	15	18	3	2	2	0
Dept. of Public Safety	86	83	-3	12	12	0	2	5	3
<b>Courts</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
Local adult criminal court	67	63	-4	28	26	-2	5	11	6
Local juvenile court system	52	51	-1	35	32	-3	13	17	4
<b>Probation and Parole</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
Local adult community services/supervision division	46	40	-6	37	36	-1	17	24	7
Local juvenile community services/supervision division	43	35	-8	37	40	3	20	25	5
State adult parole division	42	34	-8	48	39	-9	10	26	16
State juvenile parole division	41	30	-11	39	38	-1	20	32	12
<b>Corrections/ Prisons</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
State adult prisons	57	52	-5	36	32	-4	7	16	9
State juvenile prisons	43	40	-3	37	36	-1	20	24	4
<b>System as a whole</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
State criminal justice system	63	58	-5	33	35	2	4	7	3
State Juvenile justice system	49	45	-4	38	39	1	3	16	13

“some” confidence, those reporting “little” or “no” confidence, and those reporting “don’t know” in response to the particular question.

The most noteworthy trends reflected in Table 3.1 are consistent reductions in the number of respondents reporting “a great deal” or “some” confidence in the components of both the adult and juvenile justice systems. There are also consistent increases in the number of respondents reporting that they don’t know how much confidence they have in the systems and their components. Overall, Texans in 2007 report considerably lower levels of confidence in the criminal and juvenile justice systems and their components than they did in 1998.

The largest change in the number of respondents reporting “a great deal” or “some” confidence was an 11% decrease in the number of respondents expressing confidence in the juvenile parole system in 2007 (30%) compared with 1998 (41%). The next largest drop was an 8% reduction in the number of respondents expressing confidence in adult and juvenile probation systems.

In both 2004 and 2007 more than half of the respondents to the survey reported having confidence in the law enforcement and judicial components of the system. Fewer than half of the respondents in both years expressed confidence in the different components associated with community-based supervision programs including probation and parole components at the adult and juvenile levels. About half of the respondents report confidence in the adult prison system (57% in 1998 and 52% in 2007) with only about 40% expressing confidence in the juvenile prison system (43% in 1998 and 40% in 2007). It is important to note that the data collection for this project had ceased prior to the revelations concerning allegations of abuse and neglect associated with the Texas Youth Commission (responsible for the State “juvenile prisons”).

There was also a slight decrease in the number of respondents reporting that they have “little or no” confidence in each of the system components (represented by negative % change values in the “Little or no” column). In most instances the reductions in confidence in the systems and their components resulted in more of the 2007 respondents stating that they “don’t know” how much confidence they have in them (represented by positive % change values in the “Don’t know” column).

When asked about their confidence in the criminal and juvenile justice systems at large, in both years more respondents expressed confidence in the adult system than they did in the juvenile system. In 2007, only 58% of the respondents expressed confidence in the adult criminal justice system compared to 63% in 1998. Similarly, in 1998 49% of the respondents had “a great deal” or “some” confidence in the juvenile justice system at large compared to only 45% of the 2007 sample. Also, more of the 2007 respondents reported having “little or no” confidence in the adult and juvenile justice systems when compared with the 1998 respondents.

Respondents were also asked to identify how familiar they were and whether or not they had any direct contact with the different components of the system. The distribution of their responses to these questions are presented in Tables 3.2 and 3.3.

In both years, those respondents reporting that they were familiar with the different components of the systems were generally more likely to report having confidence in those components. This association is more pronounced in the 1998 sample in part because of a considerable decrease in the number of the 2007 respondents who were familiar with the system and its components reporting confidence in them. For example, in 2007 only 48% of those respondents who were familiar with the adult criminal justice system reported having “a great deal” or “some” confidence in the system compared to 67% of the same group in 1998. Similarly, there was a 13% reduction in the number of respondents who were both familiar with and confident in the adult community services divisions from 1998 (57%) to 2007 (44%).

Generally, more of those respondents claiming to be familiar with the systems and their components in 2007 reported having “little” or “no” confidence in them compared to 1998. This pattern is most apparent when

TABLE 3.2

CONFIDENCE IN THE COMPONENTS OF THE CRIMINAL/JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN TEXAS AND LEVEL OF FAMILIARITY RESPONDENT HAD WITH THE COMPONENT - 1998 (N = 584) AND 2007 (N = 332)

Justice System Components	“A great deal” or “Some” confidence		% Change	“Little” or “No” Confidence		% Change	Don’t know		% Change
	1998	2007		1998	2007		1998	2007	
<b>Law Enforcement</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
Local Police Dept.									
Familiar	85	82	-3	14	18	4	1	<1	0
Not Familiar	71	70	-1	24	20	-4	4	10	6
Dept. of Public Safety									
Familiar	89	88	-1	10	11	1	1	1	0
Not Familiar	72	68	-4	21	16	-5	7	16	9
<b>Courts</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
Local adult criminal court									
Familiar	73	67	-6	26	29	3	1	4	3
Not Familiar	57	53	-4	33	21	-12	10	27	17
Local juvenile court system									
Familiar	59	59	0	34	37	3	7	4	-3
Not Familiar	47	38	-9	36	30	-6	7	32	25
<b>Probation and Parole</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
Local adult community services/ supervision division									
Familiar	57	44	-13	35	49	14	8	7	-1
Not Familiar	39	38	-1	35	25	-10	22	37	15
Local juvenile community services/ supervision division									
Familiar	55	44	-11	36	51	15	9	5	-4
Not Familiar	35	30	-5	39	37	-2	26	33	7
State adult parole division									
Familiar	48	38	-10	46	54	8	6	8	2
Not Familiar	38	34	-4	50	31	-19	13	35	22
State juvenile parole division									
Familiar	51	39	-12	40	53	13	10	8	-2
Not Familiar	36	28	-8	41	32	-9	24	40	16
<b>Corrections/ Prisons</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
State adult prisons									
Familiar	61	58	-3	37	38	1	2	4	2
Not Familiar	54	46	-8	35	27	-8	11	27	16
State juvenile prisons									
Familiar	51	50	-1	38	45	7	11	5	-6
Not Familiar	37	36	-1	38	32	-6	25	32	7
<b>System as a whole</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
State criminal justice system									
Familiar	67	48	-19	31	41	10	2	1	-1
Not Familiar	53	63	10	38	21	-17	9	15	6
State Juvenile justice system									
Familiar	55	48	-7	40	47	7	5	5	0
Not Familiar	44	47	3	38	32	-6	19	20	1

**TABLE 3.3**  
**CONFIDENCE IN THE COMPONENTS OF THE CRIMINAL/JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN TEXAS AND**  
**WHETHER OR NOT RESPONDENT HAD CONTACT WITH THE COMPONENT DURING THE PAST YEAR - 2007**  
**(N = 332) AND 1998 (N = 584)**

Justice System Components	“A great deal” or “Some” confidence		% Change	“Little” or “No” Confidence		% Change	Don’t know		% Change
	1998	2007		1998	2007		1998	2007	
<b>Law Enforcement</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
Local Police Dept.									
Contact	84	77	-7	16	23	7	1	0	-1
No Contact	84	83	-1	15	13	-2	4	5	1
Dept. of Public Safety									
Contact	91	83	-8	7	16	9	1	1	0
No Contact	83	83	0	14	10	-4	7	7	0
<b>Courts</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
Local adult criminal court									
Contact	82	60	-22	26	37	11	2	3	1
No Contact	64	63	-1	32	22	-10	5	14	9
Local juvenile court system									
Contact	65	51	-14	35	49	14	0	0	0
No Contact	52	51	-1	45	29	-16	14	20	6
<b>Probation and Parole</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
Local adult community services/ supervision division									
Contact	77	38	-39	23	58	35	0	3	3
No Contact	44	40	-4	38	31	-7	18	29	11
Local juvenile community services/ supervision division									
Contact	70	31	-39	27	64	37	3	4	1
No Contact	41	35	-6	38	37	-1	21	28	7
State adult parole division									
Contact	54	29	-25	40	66	26	6	5	-1
No Contact	41	35	-6	48	36	-12	10	30	20
State juvenile parole division									
Contact	70	20	-50	20	73	53	10	7	-3
No Contact	41	32	-9	40	35	-5	19	34	15
<b>Corrections/ Prisons</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
State adult prisons									
Contact	71	54	-17	27	46	19	2	0	-2
No Contact	56	52	-4	37	30	-7	7	19	12
State juvenile prisons									
Contact	56	47	-9	38	53	15	6	0	-6
No Contact	43	40	-3	37	34	-3	20	25	5
<b>System as a whole</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>		<b>1998</b>	<b>2007</b>	
State criminal justice system									
Contact	NA	49		NA	51		NA	0	
No Contact	NA	62		NA	30		NA	8	
State Juvenile justice system									
Contact	NA	39		NA	59		NA	2	
No Contact	NA	47		NA	36		NA	17	

examining the responses to questions about community-based corrections at both the local and state levels and for both the adult and juvenile justice-related activities. In 1998 only 35% of those respondents who were familiar with their local adult community services divisions reported having “little” or “no” confidence in them compared with 49% of the 2007 sample. Similarly, 51% of the 2007 respondents who were familiar with their local juvenile community services division reported having “little” or “no” confidence in them compared with only 35% of the 1998 sample.

In 1998 the general pattern between “contact” with the components of the justice systems and confidence in those systems was similar to the patterns concerning “familiarity.” In most instances, respondents to the 1998 survey who reported having had some sort of contact with the system components during the year prior to the survey were more likely to express confidence in those components. The figures for 2007, however, show a reversal in this pattern. In 2007, considerably fewer respondents who reported having had contact with the components of the systems reported confidence in them. This is most remarkable among those respondents reporting that they had some form of contact with the community-based components of both the adult and juvenile justice systems. In 1998, 77% of the respondents who reported having had contact with their local adult community services divisions reported having “a lot” or “some” confidence in them. In 2007, this figure had dropped to only 38%. Similarly, in 2007, only 31% of those respondents who had some sort of contact with their local juvenile community services divisions reported having confidence in them compared to 70% of the 1998 sample. The largest shift in these patterns is evidenced by the 50% reduction in the number of respondents who had some sort of contact with the state level juvenile parole system reporting confidence in their services (70% in 1998 vs. 20% in 2007). Patterns similar to these but not as extreme existed for each of the other components as well with the smallest reductions in confidence occurring in reference to local- and state-level law enforcement agencies.

The 1998 sample was not asked about their overall contact with the systems at large, so the association between “contact” and “confidence” across the two different time periods cannot be compared on the system-wide level. Over 50% of those respondents participating in the 2007 survey who had experienced some sort of contact with the criminal and juvenile justice systems reported having “little” or “no” confidence in them. Fifty-one percent reported little or no confidence in the criminal justice system, and 59% reported little or no confidence in the juvenile justice system.



## SECTION 4: Confidence in different areas of expert witness testimony presented during criminal trials

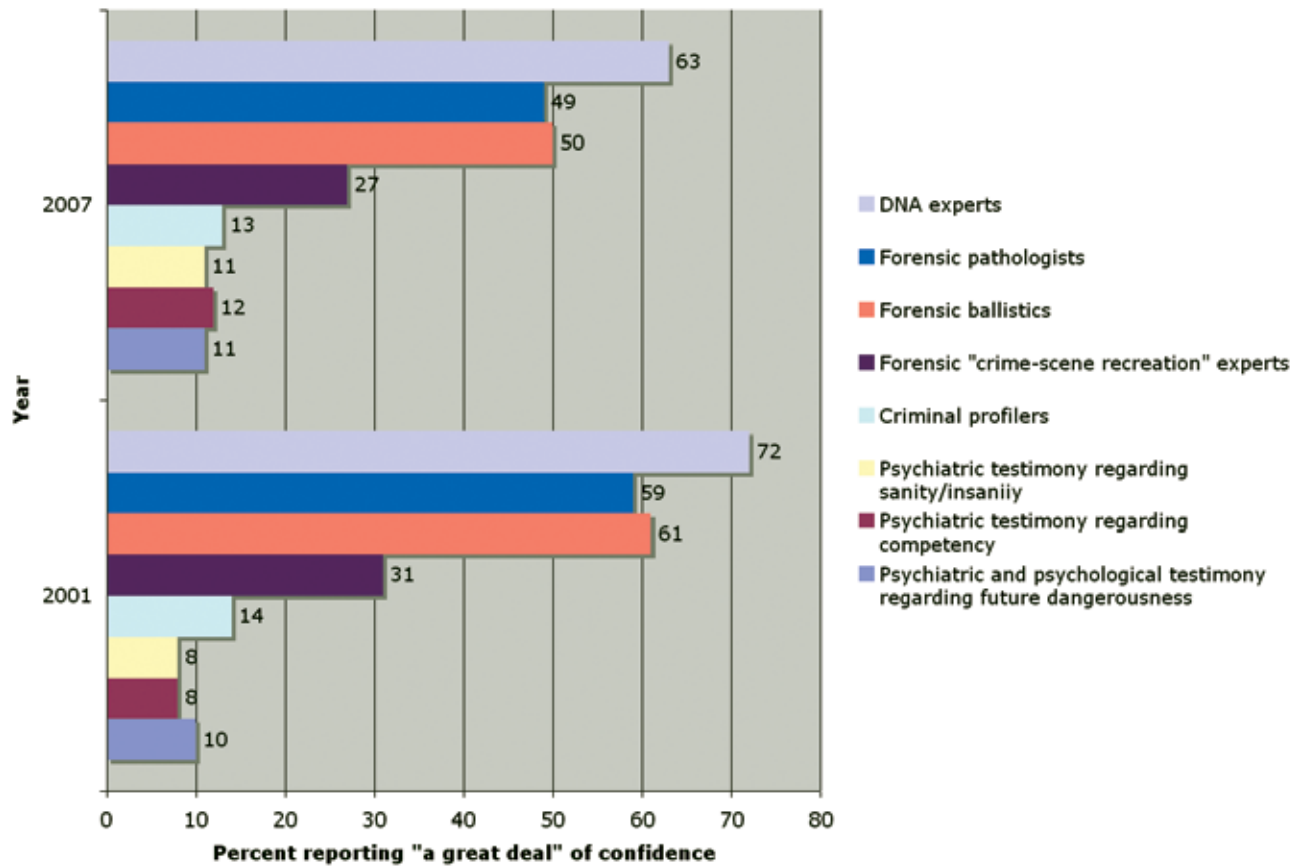
The next section of the 2007 survey included a series of questions asking respondents to identify how much confidence they thought they would have in several different areas of “expert witness” testimony that might be given in criminal trials. The same questions were included in the *2001 Texas Crime Poll*. In both surveys, respondents were asked the following question “*If you were serving as a juror on a criminal case, how much confidence do you think you would have in the accuracy of testimony presented by each of the following ‘expert witnesses’?*” followed by a list of eight different “expert witnesses.” Respondents in both years were presented with the same set of “confidence” responses reported in the previous section.

Table 4.1 shows the percent of respondents reporting each level of confidence for eight different types of “expert witness” testimony. Figures reported in Table 4.1 show that respondents in both years had more confidence in DNA experts, forensic pathologists, and forensic “crime scene recreation experts” and lower levels of confidence in testimony presented by criminal profilers, psychiatrists, and psychologists. In both years, the lowest levels of confidence were reported in experts testifying about sanity/insanity, competency, and future dangerousness.

**TABLE 4.1**  
**CONFIDENCE IN EXPERT WITNESS TESTIMONY PROVIDED IN CRIMINAL CASES IN TEXAS 2001**  
**(N = 821) AND 2007 (N = 332)**

Nature of Expert Witness Testimony	A lot of confidence		Some Confidence		Little Confidence		No Confidence	
	2001	2007	2001	2007	2001	2007	2001	2007
DNA experts	72	63	26	31	1	3	<1	3
Forensic pathologists	59	49	38	43	2	5	1	3
Forensic ballistics	61	50	37	43	2	4	<1	4
Forensic “crime-scene recreation” experts	31	27	60	53	9	16	1	4
Criminal profilers	14	13	62	52	22	28	2	7
Psychiatric testimony regarding sanity/insanity	8	11	48	32	37	43	8	13
Psychiatric testimony regarding competency	8	12	49	39	35	37	8	13
Psychiatric and psychological testimony regarding future dangerousness	10	11	44	36	33	34	13	19

Figure 4.1 graphically demonstrates the levels of respondents reporting that they would have “a great deal” of confidence in each of the different areas of expert testimony. In both 2001 and 2007 over 60% of the respondents to the surveys reported having a “great deal” of confidence in DNA experts, and between 49 and 50 percent reported having a “great deal” of confidence in forensic pathologists and forensic ballistics experts. Conversely, only about 10% of the respondents in both years reported having similar levels of confidence in psychiatric and/or psychological testimony. It is also apparent that there was overall less confidence in expert witnesses in 2007 than there was in 2001.



**FIGURE 4.1**  
**RESPONDENTS REPORTING "A GREAT DEAL" OF CONFIDENCE IN EIGHT DIFFERENT EXPERT WITNESSES**  
**2001 vs. 2007**



## SECTION 5: Confidence in Texas' death penalty system and support for the death penalty

Respondents to the *2007 Texas Crime Poll* were also asked a series of questions about how much confidence they have in the Texas' death penalty system in five different areas listed in Table 5.1. This same series of questions was asked of a sample of Texans who participated in the *2001 Texas Crime Poll*. Respondents were then asked whether or not they supported the death penalty for the crime of murder, and those who responded "Yes" were also asked if they would support a law that would make "repeat child sex abusers" eligible for the death penalty. The proportions of respondents expressing each of the different levels of confidence are presented in Table 5.1. Discussion of the findings from this section will first focus on the "confidence" questions followed by discussion of the respondents' support for the death penalty for murder and child sex abusers.

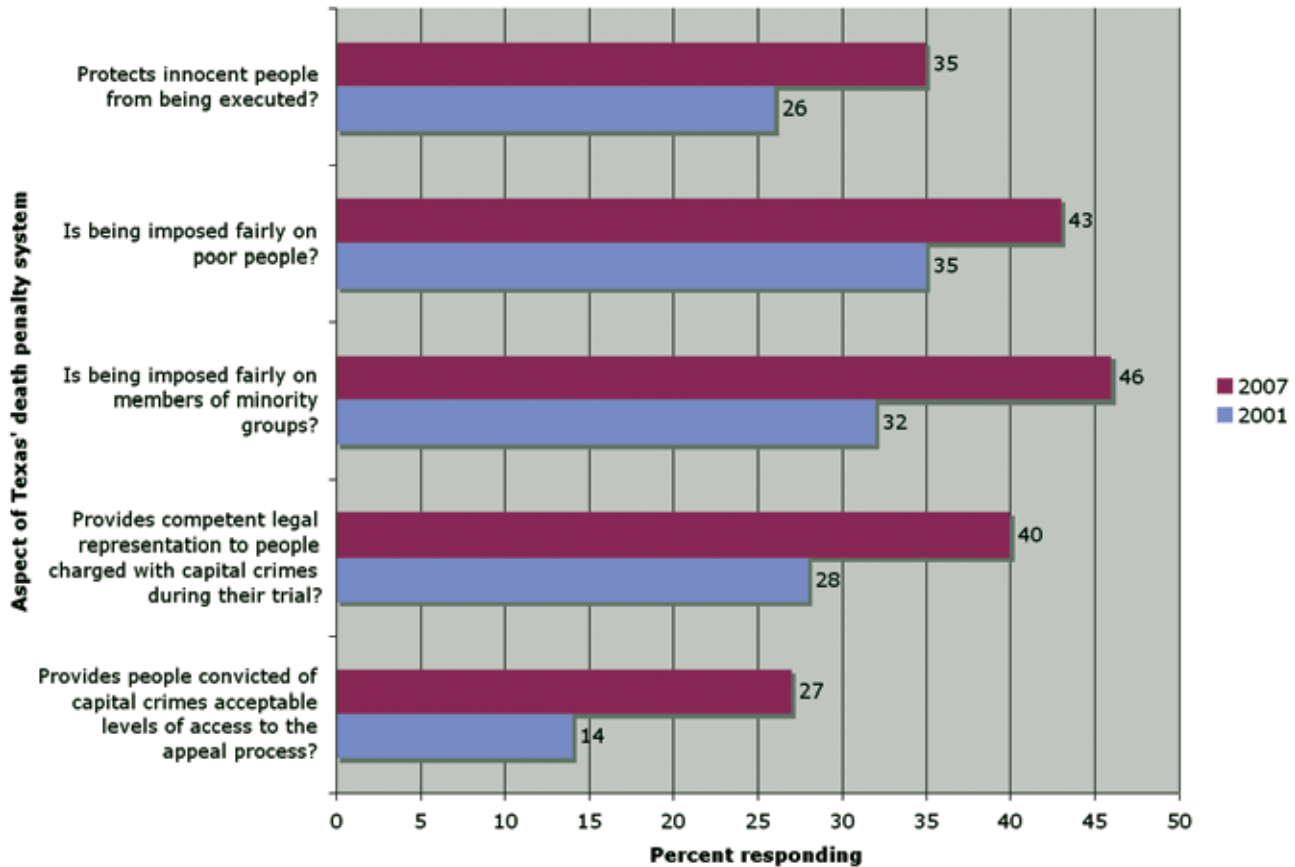
**TABLE 5.1**  
**CONFIDENCE TEXAS' DEATH PENALTY SYSTEM 2001 (N = 821) AND 2007 (N = 332)**

How much confidence do you have that the death penalty system in Texas:	A lot of confidence		Some Confidence		Little Confidence		No Confidence	
	2001	2007	2001	2007	2001	2007	2001	2007
Protects innocent people from being executed?	27	23	46	43	17	24	9	11
Is being imposed fairly on poor people?	21	23	41	34	24	28	11	15
Is being imposed fairly on members of minority groups?	23	23	43	30	21	29	11	17
Provides competent legal representation to people charged with capital crimes during their trial?	22	20	49	40	21	27	7	13
Provides people convicted of capital crimes acceptable levels of access to the appeal process?	36	35	45	38	10	17	4	10

Table 5.1 shows that in both years, the level of confidence in Texas' death penalty system is modest at best. Only about a quarter of the respondents in either year expressed "a lot of confidence" in the system's ability to ensure that innocent people are not executed (27% in 2001 and 23% in 2007). Similar proportions were reported concerning levels of confidence that the death penalty system is being administered fairly (21% in 2001 and 23% in 2007) and with competent legal representation. About a third of the respondents in both years reported having "little" or "no" confidence in each of the different areas of the death penalty system, leaving about 40% expressing "some" confidence in the system. In almost every case, respondents in 2007 reported lower levels of confidence in the death penalty system than did the 2001 respondents.

Figure 5.1 graphically demonstrates decreased levels of confidence respondents have in the death penalty system showing that concerns about the ability for the death penalty system to perform accurately and fairly have increased. Over a third (35%) of today's respondents have "little" or "no" confidence in the ability for the death penalty system to protect innocent people from being executed. Almost half of today's respondents have "little" or "no" confidence in the ability for the death penalty system to be applied fairly against minority group members (46%) compared to only 32% of the 2001 respondents. Also, 40% of the 2007 respondents expressed

concerns about the competency of legal representation being provided to capital defendants, and 43% were concerned about the ability for the death penalty system to be applied fairly against poor people. In 2001 these figures were considerably smaller in all cases.



**FIGURE 5.1**  
**RESPONDENTS REPORTING “LITTLE” OR “NO” CONFIDENCE IN EIGHT DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF TEXAS’ DEATH PENALTY SYSTEM 2001 vs. 2007**

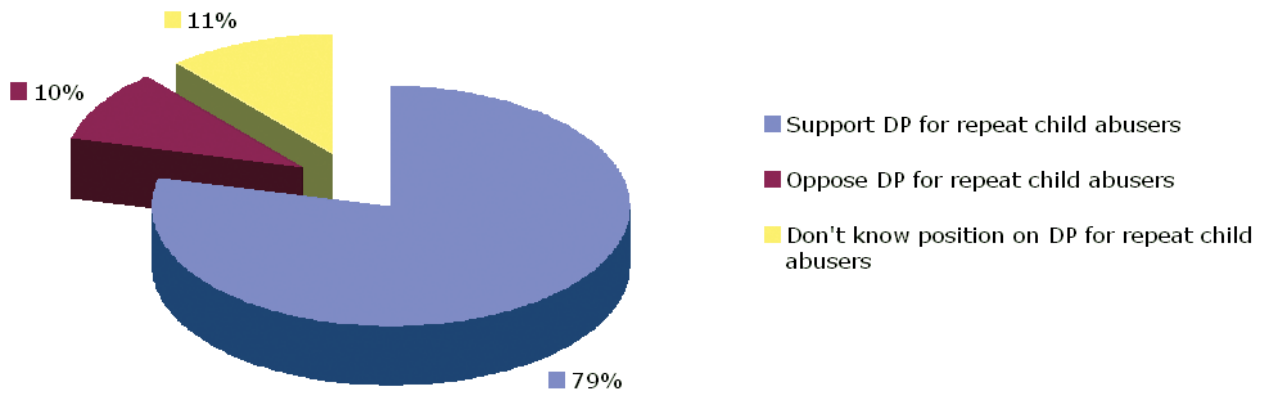
In spite of there only being a modest level of confidence in the death penalty system, Table 5.2 shows that 74% of the participants in the *2007 Texas Crime Poll* support the death penalty for the crime of murder. Only 18% oppose its use, and 8% are uncertain about their position on the death penalty.

The levels of support for the death penalty for each of the sub-groups reported in Table 5.2 correspond to previous research showing that women, Black respondents, democrats, and Catholics are less likely to support the death penalty for the crime of murder than are others. The relatively high proportion of the Black respondents in the 2007 survey who support the death penalty is likely the result of their general under-representation in this year’s sample. It is also apparent from Table 5.2 that fewer respondents support the death penalty in 2007 than they did 2001. Overall, 74% of this year’s sample support the death penalty compared to 80% in 2001. It is worth noting, however, that the number of respondents opposing the death penalty did not change over the two time periods with 18% of the respondents falling into this group each year. Instead, the number of respondents reporting that they “don’t know” whether or not they support the sanction increased from 2% in 2001 to 8% in 2007.

**TABLE 5.2**  
**PERCENT OF DIFFERENT GROUPS OF TEXANS SUPPORTING THE DEATH PENALTY FOR THE**  
**CRIME OF MURDER 2001 (N = 821) AND 2007 (N = 332)**

	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	2001	2007	2001	2007	2001	2007
<b>Total Sample</b>	80	74	18	18	2	8
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	80	77	15	17	4	6
Female	66	67	28	21	6	12
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>						
White	80	79	14	14	5	7
Black	41	73	53	18	6	9
Hispanic	70	66	27	26	3	8
Other	63	71	25	18	13	12
<b>Age</b>						
Mean	46	57	43	55	51	57
SD	18.27	14.94	19.4	11.54	21.72	13.12
<b>Education</b>						
Less than high school	60	67	31	17	9	17
High school graduate	75	76	17	17	8	8
Some college	78	81	19	13	3	6
College or more	73	67	24	27	3	6
<b>Household Income</b>						
< \$15,000	54	67	46	26	0	7
\$15,001 - \$30,000	72	68	19	21	8	11
\$30,000 - \$60,000	73	78	23	15	4	7
> \$60,000	81	73	14	20	5	7
<b>Political Preference</b>						
Republican	89	86	9	8	2	6
Democrat	56	62	36	28	8	9
Independent	77	67	19	27	4	10
Other	33	90	67	0	0	10
<b>Religious Preference</b>						
Protestant	80	82	15	14	6	4
Catholic	65	67	30	23	5	10
Jewish	33	50	67	50	3	0
Other	100	73	0	16	0	11

In addition to asking respondents whether or not they support the death penalty for the crime of murder, those respondents indicating support for the death penalty were asked “*Would you support legislation that would make the death penalty available for persons convicted of two violent sexual offenses against a child under the age of 14?*” Figure 5.2 shows that 79% of those respondents who initially supported the death penalty said they would support a law generalizing that sanction to repeat violent child abusers. Ten percent would oppose such legislation, and another 11% indicated that they didn’t know whether or not they would support the death penalty for repeat child abusers.

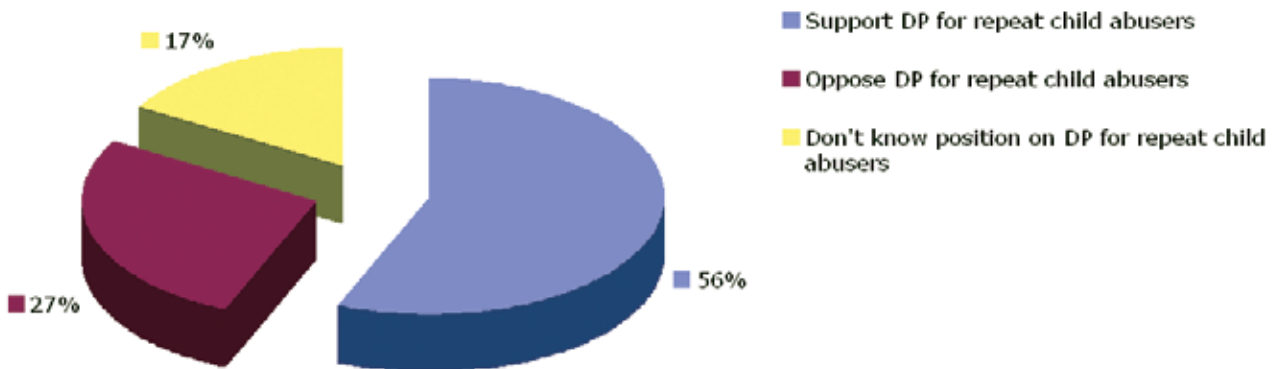


**FIGURE 5.2**

**PERCENT OF DEATH PENALTY SUPPORTERS WHO SUPPORT LEGISLATION EXPANDING THE DEATH PENALTY TO REPEAT VIOLENT CHILD SEX OFFENDERS**

Due to the sequencing of the questions in the survey, those respondents who initially indicated either a lack of support for the death penalty for the crime of murder (n = 74) or were uncertain about their position on the death penalty (n = 46) were not asked about their position on legislation that would make the death penalty available for repeat violent sex abusers.

In a number of cases, death penalty non-supporters did in fact go back and complete the follow-up question, all indicating opposition for legislation that would make repeat violent sexual crimes against children eligible for the death penalty. Figure 5.3 shows what the general distribution of support for such legislation would look like if we assume that all of these respondents would have answered the “death penalty for repeat sex offender” follow-up question the same way they had answered the “death penalty for murder” question.



**FIGURE 5.3**

**PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS SUPPORTING LEGISLATION EXPANDING THE DEATH PENALTY TO REPEAT VIOLENT CHILD SEX OFFENDERS**

The estimates reported in Figure 5.3 show that 56% of all Texans would support generalizing the death penalty to repeat violent child-sex abusers. Twenty-seven percent would oppose such legislation, and the remaining 17% are uncertain about their support for legislation that would make offenders convicted of repeat child-sexual violence eligible for the death penalty.

## General Findings and Conclusions

The general results of this year's survey show that more of today's Texans consider crime, drugs, and illegal immigration to be among the most serious problems at the local level than they did in 2004. Texans today are also more likely to identify illegal immigration and drugs as the most important problems facing the State than they were in 2004. Furthermore, today's Texans are much more likely to mention "the government" as one of the most important problems facing the nation than they were in 2004, reflecting a general malaise in citizens' satisfaction with governmental services.

This apparent increased dissatisfaction with governmental services is even more pronounced when one examines how much confidence Texans have in the adult and juvenile justice systems operating in the State. Responses to this year's survey when compared with responses to similar questions asked of a sample of Texas residents in 1998 show considerable decreases in levels of confidence in both the adult and juvenile justice systems in general.

For the most part, today's Texans are consistently less confident in the probation, parole, and prison components of both the adult and juvenile systems than they were nine years ago, and this loss of confidence is even more dramatic when examining the responses of those Texans who have had recent contact with these components. Also, though overall confidence in the law enforcement and judicial components of the justice systems has remained about the same between 1998 and 2007, Texans who report having had direct contact with the police and courts report considerably less confidence in these components today than did similarly situated respondents in 1998. This trend is contrary to conventional patterns, since survey research generally shows that respondents who report having had contact with the justice system have higher levels of confidence in it than do those who have had no contact.

Texans also report less confidence in expert witness testimony today when compared with responses to a similar set of questions asked in the 2001 Texas Crime Poll. Generally, respondents in both 2007 and 2001 expressed very little confidence in testimony presented by criminal profilers, psychiatrists, and psychologists while reporting consistently high levels of confidence in DNA experts, forensic pathologists, and forensic ballistics experts; however, when compared with responses in 2001, today's Texans have less confidence in the testimony provided by these particular experts.

Texans are also less confident in the death penalty system than they were in 2001, particularly in the system's ability to 1) protect innocent people from being executed and 2) impose the system fairly on members of minority groups. In spite of a general lack of confidence in the death penalty system to operate fairly or accurately, a majority of Texans continue to support its use in cases of murder and would support legislation making repeat violent sex offenders eligible for the death penalty. However, although support for the death penalty continues to be strong, fewer respondents support it today than they did in 2001.

The general conclusions to be drawn from these results show that over time Texans are becoming increasingly less confident in the criminal and juvenile justice systems and are considerably less confident in different aspects of the systems. At the same time, Texans are considering crime and drug-related problems to be more serious local problems today than they were in the past. Policies and programs aimed at increasing levels of confidence in the systems and decreasing levels of fear about crime and drugs are warranted. Increased agency-community relations activities and more responsive public relations endeavors may help reverse what appears to be a downward trend in public confidence in the justice systems Texas is using to respond to the problems of crime and drug use.



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