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Public preferences for rehabilitation versus incarceration of juvenile offenders

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ABSTRACT

While juvenile justice policy in the United States has become more punitive in recent years, it remains unclear whether the public actually favors this response in lieu of more rehabilitation-oriented services. Public opinion polling generally shows that the public favors less punitive responses than policymakers often suppose, but significant questions remain about the accuracy of these perceptions generally, and in how they have been assessed in particular. Data from four states (Illinois, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and Washington) aimed at assessing public preferences for rehabilitation and incarceration as a response to serious juvenile crime indicated that, for the most part, the public was willing to pay more in taxes for rehabilitation than incarceration.

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Introduction

Policymakers' perceptions of public attitudes about youth crime have influenced contemporary juvenile justice policy such that decision-making within the juvenile justice system has become more punitive (Benekos & Merlo, 2008; Zimring, 2005) and punishments more severe (Scott & Steinberg, 2008). Yet, it is not entirely clear the extent to which this belief represents an accurate portrayal of public perceptions (Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Mears, Hay, Gertz, & Mancini, 2007). Although some opinion surveys have found support for getting tougher on juvenile crime and punishing youths as harshly as their adult counterparts (Mears, 2001), more intense scrutiny of these data revealed that the conclusion that there is public support for the harsher treatment of juveniles is based largely on either responses to highly publicized crimes such as multiple-victim school shootings or on mass opinion polls that typically ask a few simplistic questions. An accurate assessment of public perceptions is important because policymakers often justify expenditures for juvenile justice reforms on the basis of popular demand (Nagin, Piquero, Scott, & Steinberg, 2006). In fact, policymakers' actions on this issue are often based on what they believe the public wishes the response to juvenile crime to be and what they believe will garner support for their re-election. Although "tough-on-crime" rhetoric is thought to attract voters, punitive responses to juvenile crime are far more expensive and often less effective than less harsh, rehabilitative-oriented alternatives (Lipsey, 1992; Scott & Steinberg, 2008; Zimring, 2005). Unfortunately, public opinion is not always accurately measured (Cullen, Fisher, &

Applegate, 2000). Minor adjustments in question-wording can greatly influence responses, and as is the case with public opinion research on the death penalty, deeper probing into attitudes about juvenile justice policy often shows that public opinion is much more nuanced than typically portrayed (Scott & Steinberg, 2008).

In a study designed to overcome these limitations, Nagin et al. (2006) assessed public opinion toward juvenile justice policy using an approach that differs from conventional polling, by measuring respondents' willingness to pay (WTP) for alternative policy proposals, including a comparison of respondents' WTP for incarceration versus rehabilitation of juvenile offenders who had committed serious violent crimes.¹ Using data from Pennsylvania residents, these authors found that, if promised comparable crime reductions, the public was at least as willing to pay for rehabilitation as incarceration for juvenile offenders, and that their WTP for an early childhood prevention program was also substantial. Further, they found that even individuals who identified themselves as conservative or who supported punitive policies also indicated substantial WTP for rehabilitation and prevention programs.

These results were intriguing, but they remain limited because they emerged from a study of just one state. It remains unclear whether the finding that the public prefers rehabilitation to incarceration is replicable and generalizable to other locales. This study was a 2007 replication of that previous effort, conducted again in Pennsylvania (two years later) and in three other states (Illinois, Louisiana, and Washington) that varied considerably in their demographics, political orientations, and juvenile crime problems. The study employed the same experimental methodology ("contingent valuation") that permitted a comparison of respondents' opinions about two juvenile justice policy alternatives that were presented as equally effective. Any observed differences in respondents' WTP for two policies of equal effectiveness must necessarily indicate a true preference for one over the other, and in this vein sheds

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more definitive light on public views about juvenile punishment than does more traditional approaches to polling.

Data and methods

During spring 2007, a random digit telephone interview was conducted with an original total sample of 29,532 telephone numbers from four states (Illinois, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and Washington). Respondents must have been at least age eighteen to participate in the interview. A great many of the original telephone numbers were deemed ineligible for various reasons, including: business/government number, fax machine, answering machine picked up, line disconnected, no answer, nonworking number, technical phone problems, number changed, and respondent never available/unknown eligibility (i.e., the interviewers never reached anyone at those telephone numbers). Of the remaining eligible numbers, about two-thirds of those reached refused, leaving a completed sample across all four states of 2,282 (Illinois n=563, Louisiana n=572, Pennsylvania n=588, and Washington n=559).² The overall response rate was over 32 percent, with state-specific response rates of 27 percent, 37 percent, 29 percent, and 37 percent for Illinois, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and Washington, respectively. These response rates were only slightly lower than those reported in other similar contingent valuation (CV) studies (Cohen, Rust, Steen, & Tidd, 2004), but were quite consistent with the recent trend in telephone survey-based research, which had run into problems associated with a significant movement away from land-lines to cell-lines, which are not yet captured in many survey research centers' data bases. This notwithstanding, the final sample characteristics (race, sex, etc.) closely mirrored each state's population.³

The survey instrument was identical to the one employed by Nagin et al. (2006) in their Pennsylvania study, which used an extensive design process that included pretesting among young adults. The survey instrument mimics guidelines established by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for studies employing the CV methodology, and is similar to other CV studies in criminal justice (Cohen et al., 2004; Ludwig & Cook, 2001).

Respondents were presented with hypothetical scenarios and numerous questions about their background and attitudes (see Appendix A). The basic survey was the same for all individuals, with one important exception: one item, which asked respondents if they would be willing to pay an additional amount of money in taxes for the implementation of a particular crime policy proposal, was systematically varied. Half of the sample, randomly selected, responded to a proposal to increase the amount of rehabilitative services provided to serious juvenile offenders, without any increase in their time incarcerated, whereas the other half of the sample responded to a proposal to increase the amount of time serious juvenile offenders were incarcerated for their crime, without the addition of any rehabilitative services.⁴ After reading the scenarios, respondents were asked: "Would you be willing to pay the additional \$100 in taxes for this change in the law?" Those who indicated 'yes' were asked an additional follow-up question: "Would you be willing to pay \$200 for the same change?" Respondents who indicated 'no' to the original question also were asked an additional follow-up question: "Would you be willing to pay an additional \$50 for this change?" Response options to all questions were 'yes' and 'no.' WTP was arrayed according to four bid levels across each of the four states: (1) those who said no to \$100 and no to \$50 (to be conservative in the estimate of average WTP—see below—coded \$0); (2) those who said yes to \$50 but no to \$100 (coded \$50); (3) those who said yes to \$100 but no to \$200 (coded \$100); and (4) those who said yes to \$100 and yes to \$200 (coded \$200).⁵

Results

Table 1 presents the initial WTP results. With regard to the rehabilitation-added scenario, 28.5 percent of the respondents were

Table 1
WTP results (full sample, valid percent)

Bid	Rehabilitation	Incarceration
WTP = \$0	28.5%	39.0%
WTP = \$50	7.5%	9.0%
WTP = \$100	33.2%	25.0%
WTP = \$200	30.8%	27.0%
Average WTP	\$98.49	\$83.52

unwilling to pay for the additional services, whereas the rest were willing to pay at least \$50. Indeed, over 60 percent of the respondents who received the rehabilitation-added scenario were willing to pay at least \$100 for the program. With regard to the incarceration-added scenario, 39 percent of the respondents were unwilling to pay for additional incarceration, a much higher percentage compared to the rehabilitation-added scenario. A little over 50 percent of the respondents who responded to the incarceration-added scenario were willing to pay at least \$100. Perhaps the most interesting finding concerns the average WTP for the rehabilitation-added and incarceration-added scenarios. The average WTP was more than \$15 greater for the addition of rehabilitation services, \$98.49/household, than for the addition of an extra year of incarceration, \$83.52/household. Interestingly, the Pennsylvania figures were nearly identical to those obtained two years earlier by Nagin et al. (2006), which were \$98 and \$81 for rehabilitation and incarceration, respectively.

Figs. 1 and 2 display this information in graphical format, and both show that across all four states combined, the public favored rehabilitation over incarceration as a response to serious juvenile offending (Cullen, Golden, & Cullen, 1983). More respondents were willing to pay for additional rehabilitation than for additional incarceration, and the average amount in additional annual taxes that respondents were willing to pay for rehabilitation was almost 20 percent greater than for incarceration. Conversely, significantly more respondents were unwilling to pay for additional incarceration (39 percent) than were unwilling to pay for added rehabilitation (29 percent).

Fig. 3 shows that this general pattern held in three of the four states: Pennsylvania, Washington, and Illinois. In Pennsylvania, the public was willing to pay 18 percent more for rehabilitation than incarceration (\$98 versus \$83). In Washington, the public was willing to pay 29 percent more (\$102 versus \$79). In Illinois, the public was willing to pay 36 percent more for rehabilitation than incarceration (\$100 versus \$73). In Louisiana, the amounts for rehabilitation and incarceration were equivalent (\$94 versus \$98).

Table 2 presents these same results across the four states and for each respective condition. A number of important results emerged. First, across three of the four states (with the exception of Louisiana), a higher percentage of respondents were unwilling to pay additional

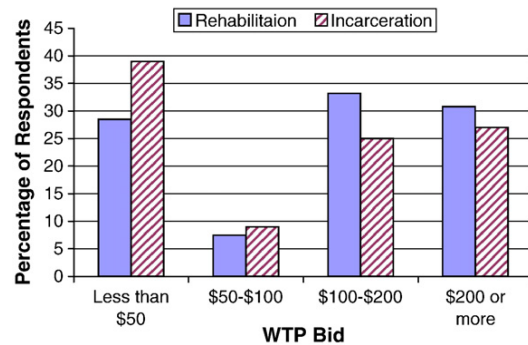


Fig. 1. Amount willing to pay in additional taxes annually for rehabilitation or incarceration.

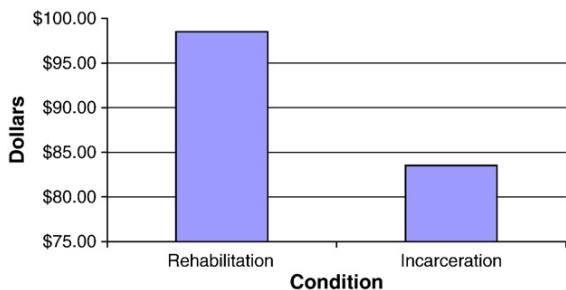


Fig. 2. Average amount public is willing to pay annually in additional taxes for rehabilitation or incarceration.

taxes for the added incarceration. Second, at the other extreme, across three of the four states (again, with the exception of Louisiana), a higher percentage of respondents were more likely to be willing to pay the maximum amount of money for additional rehabilitation. Third, whereas there were significant between-state differences in the average amount respondents were willing to pay for incarceration (both Louisiana and Pennsylvania were significantly higher than both Illinois and Washington; see Table 3), states did not differ in their average WTP for rehabilitation, suggesting that between-state differences in policy preferences were due more to differences in opposition to additional incarceration than in preference for rehabilitation.⁶

Cost-benefit analysis

This section uses the earlier results in order to provide a rough cost-benefit analysis. Cost-benefit analysis is not without controversy, yet it does provide important information, especially when considering the difficulties of allocating scarce resources across a range of policy options (Caldwell, Vitacco, & van Rybroek, 2006). Not only does the use of dollars in a cost-benefit analysis provide a common metric for analyzing criminal justice policy with respect to the prevention of crimes (Cohen, 2005, p. 5), such estimates also provide a useful means of comparing different types of crime prevention efforts which can assist in public policy decision-making (Cohen, 2005, pp. 6-7; Difulio, 1990, p. 51).

The WTP estimates for incarceration and rehabilitation at the household level provided the basis for calculating statewide WTP for each of the two options. This analysis began with a count of the number of households for each state. According to the 2000 U.S.

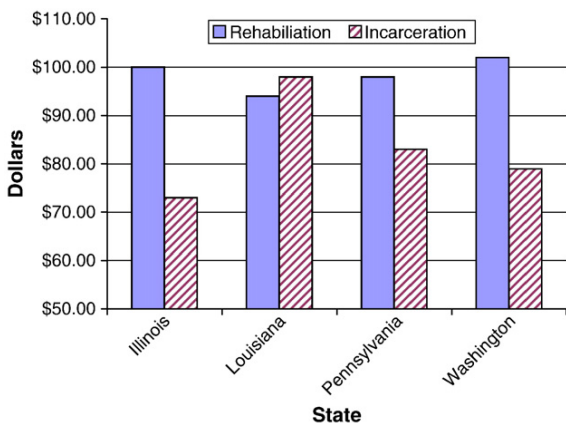


Fig. 3. Annual amount public is willing to pay in additional taxes for rehabilitation or incarceration.

Table 2
WTP results (state-specific, valid percent)

Bid	Illinois		Louisiana		Pennsylvania		Washington	
	Rehab	Incar	Rehab	Incar	Rehab	Incar	Rehab	Incar
WTP = \$0	27.4%	45.8%	32.2%	32.1%	29.7%	39.6%	24.7%	38.7%
WTP = \$50	8.3%	8.3%	9.3%	8.9%	6.5%	8.5%	6.1%	10.5%
WTP = \$100	33.1%	22.7%	27.5%	23.9%	33.0%	25.2%	39.2%	28.2%
WTP = \$200	31.2%	23.1%	31.0%	35.0%	30.8%	26.7%	30.0%	22.6%
Average WTP	\$99.62	\$73.10	\$94.18	\$98.39	\$97.82	\$82.77	\$102.28	\$78.62

Census, there were about 4.59 million households in Illinois, 1.65 million in Louisiana,⁷ 4.77 million in Pennsylvania, and 2.27 in Washington. Based on this scale factor, Table 4 translates the CV-based estimates of average WTP per household into statewide WTP.

Statewide WTP measured the total dollar value of the benefits of these options as perceived by respondents in the four states. The CV methodology was not designed to provide an accounting of the relative contributions of various types of perceived benefits of rehabilitation or incarceration that contributed to respondents' WTP. Given that respondents were willing to pay more for the same reduction in crime achieved via rehabilitation as that achieved through incarceration, it was presumed that even if crime reduction was the largest perceived benefit of rehabilitation, other types of benefits such as social productivity of increased employment and individual welfare of affected youths likely contributed as well. In the case of additional incarceration, respondents likely valued retribution as well as increased crime reduction.

The results indicated that for three of the four states (the exception was Louisiana), the addition of rehabilitation was anticipated to yield a higher dollar amount in program benefits. In Illinois the difference between the anticipated program benefits associated with rehabilitation compared to added incarceration was roughly \$120 million, in Pennsylvania it was \$72 million, and in Washington it was \$54 million. For Louisiana, program benefits were \$7 million more for added incarceration than rehabilitation.

The second input for a cost-benefit analysis was cost estimation. Total annual cost was calculated by multiplying an estimate of the annual cost per individual in the target population by an estimate of size of the target population. Table 5 reports this calculation for each program type.

Determining costs per program across states was difficult, as there existed a wide range of programs, options, and lengths of stays for individual juvenile offenders. Consider first the estimates of the annual cost per person. A 2003 study by the Washington State

Table 3
Analysis of variance (in \$)

State	WTP rehabilitation	WTP incarceration
Illinois	99.624	73.106
Louisiana	94.186	98.392
Pennsylvania	97.826	82.777
Washington	102.281	78.629
F-test	0.491	4.965*
Tukey's B post-hoc	-	PA = LA > IL = WA

* p < .05.

Table 4
Program benefits (state-specific)

Treatment	IL statewide WTP per year (WTP * # of HH)	LA statewide WTP per year (WTP * # of HH)	PA statewide WTP per year (WTP * # of HH)	WA statewide WTP per year (WTP * # of HH)
Rehabilitation	\$ 457 mil.	\$ 155 mil.	\$ 467 mil.	\$ 232 mil.
Incarceration	\$ 335 mil.	\$ 162 mil.	\$ 395 mil.	\$ 178 mil.

Table 5
Programs costs by treatment: rehabilitation and incarceration

State	Ave. cost per person - year	Size of target population	Total cost
<i>Pennsylvania</i>			
Rehabilitation	\$10,000	3990	\$39,900,000
Incarceration	\$55,000	3990	\$219,450,000
<i>Illinois</i>			
Rehabilitation	\$10,000	2655	\$26,550,000
Incarceration	\$35,000	2655	\$92,925,000
<i>Louisiana</i>			
Rehabilitation	\$10,000	1800	\$18,000,000
Incarceration	\$28,500	1800	\$51,300,000
<i>Washington</i>			
Rehabilitation	\$10,000	1638	\$16,380,000
Incarceration	\$35,000	1638	\$57,330,000

Institute for Public Policy reported the cost of a great variety of treatment programs for juvenile offender programs (Aos, Lieb, Mayfield, Miller, & Pennucci, 2004). The three most expensive rehabilitation programs were multi-systemic therapy (\$5,681 annually), mentoring (\$6,471), and intensive parole (\$5,992). To be conservative in the estimation of the benefits of rehabilitation relative to cost, a high-end cost annual estimate of \$10,000 per person (for rehabilitation) was used. (Note: data from all four states indicated that the \$10,000 estimate approximated the average annual nonresidential cost of rehabilitation services.)

Cost estimates for incarceration were drawn from both Nagin et al.'s (2006) Pennsylvania study, and more specific information obtained from the other three states. A bulletin from Pennsylvania's Department of Public Welfare (2004) reported per diem rates for confinement in various types of secure facilities for juveniles. The average for 2004 was \$306/day, which translated into an annual cost of \$111,000. To avoid overstating the benefit to cost ratio of rehabilitation relative to incarceration, the figure was divided by 50 percent such that an annual cost estimate of \$55,000 per juvenile was used.⁸ In both Washington and Illinois, average annual cost of juvenile confinement was reported at \$70,000, and again this amount was halved to \$35,000 for each state. For Louisiana, average annual cost of juvenile confinement was reported at \$57,000, which when halved, amounted to \$28,500. The use of an overestimate of the cost of rehabilitation and an underestimate of the cost of incarceration thus made the calculation of the relative cost-benefit ratios more favorable for the estimation of incarceration, yielding a more conservative test of the hypothesis that rehabilitation was more cost-effective.

Next, estimates of the size of the target population of youths who would receive added rehabilitation or incarceration was obtained. The four states did not report comparable data on the number of juveniles who were incarcerated for committing the type of serious violent crime (robbery) which was the subject of the WTP scenarios used in this study. Nevertheless, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2005) maintained the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement Databook, and the total number of juvenile placements (committed plus detained, diversion cases were not included) was used.

Combining the benefits and costs in Tables 4 and 5 yielded very different benefit to cost ratios by program type and across the four states (see Table 6). While all estimates indicated that benefits as measured by WTP substantially exceeded costs, the estimated returns

Table 6
Benefit-cost ratio calculations

Treatment	Illinois	Louisiana	Pennsylvania	Washington
Rehabilitation	17.229	8.664	11.711	14.183
Incarceration	3.612	3.176	1.801	3.114

per dollar spent differed substantially between rehabilitation and incarceration. For rehabilitation, the ratio of benefits to costs ranged from a low of 8.664 to 1 (Louisiana) to a high of 17.229 to 1 (Illinois). For incarceration, the range was from 1.801 to 1 (Louisiana) to 3.612 to 1 (Illinois).

Two messages from these estimates were important. First, the benefit-cost ratio was higher for rehabilitation compared to incarceration in all four states, and ranged in magnitude across the four states; five times greater for rehabilitation than incarceration in Illinois and Pennsylvania, four times greater in Washington, and two times greater in Louisiana. Second, the benefit-cost ratios for rehabilitation were higher (and highest) in both Illinois and Washington, while the benefit-cost ratios for incarceration were lower (and lowest) in Pennsylvania and Washington.

One other finding reflected in Table 6 was worth noting, and this concerned the difference in return between incarceration and rehabilitation. Both implied large returns, but the difference in magnitude between rehabilitation in benefit per dollar spent versus incarceration per dollar spent was striking. This difference was largely attributable to the differences in cost per person between rehabilitation and incarceration because the assumed size of the target population was the same in both sets of calculations. In fact, had the actual current annual cost of incarcerating a juvenile in each of the states (which typically run in the \$100,000 range) been used, the benefit to cost ratio for incarceration would be more than halved.

Multivariate analysis

Finally, each respondent's total WTP amount (for either incarceration or rehabilitation) was predicted in a multivariate analysis. The key independent variable was the scenario condition, i.e., whether the respondent received the rehabilitation or the incarceration vignette. In four different models, other predictors were added including a state indicator, a series of state x incarceration interactions, and several demographic correlates. These interactions were undertaken because the states may have varied in crime rate and politics, and thus it was necessary to determine if the scenarios evoked different responses under different crime climates (see Table 7).⁹

Model 1 presents the results of an incarceration-only model, where the vignette condition alone was used to predict WTP. Respondents who received the incarceration vignette reported a significantly lower WTP than those who received the rehabilitation vignette. Model 2 removed the incarceration condition variable and inserted three of the four state indicators (Pennsylvania was the reference state) to predict WTP. These results indicated that relative to Pennsylvania, the states did not differ with respect to average WTP (combining all respondents, regardless of the policy scenario to which they were exposed), suggesting that any differences between states in WTP for either rehabilitation or incarceration could not be attributed to differences in general tendencies to favor (or disfavor) tax increases.¹⁰ Model 3 contains the results of the interaction model, which included three state x incarceration effects. Here, one of the interactions (Louisiana x incarceration) was significant, indicating that the average WTP for incarceration was higher in Louisiana than other states.

Lastly, a model was estimated that included the incarceration condition, three state identifiers, three state x incarceration interactions, and several demographic characteristics, the latter which were included because they were known correlates of crime in general, and attitudes about crime (and crime policy) in particular. Controls were added for sex (male/female), age, race (non-White/White), and ethnicity (non-Cajun/Cajun); inclusion of these demographic variables did not render the Louisiana x incarceration interaction insignificant. Of the demographic variables, age and race had a significant effect on WTP: Whites reported a higher WTP in general (and for incarceration as well) and older respondents reported a

Table 7
OLS regression analysis predicting WTP

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Incarceration	-14.989	3.456*			-15.048	6.800*	-16.189	6.896*
States								
IL			-3.970	4.875	13.268	15.285	12.716	15.481
LA			5.991	4.857	-22.895	15.336	-27.546	15.657+
WA			0.400	4.923	13.146	15.374	11.566	15.598
PA (reference)								
IL x incarceration					-11.470	9.688	-11.589	9.809
LA x incarceration					19.255	9.656*	21.773	9.797*
WA x incarceration					8.691	9.787	-8.156	9.918
Sex							1.017	3.534
Age							-0.271	0.109*
Race (White)							9.133	4.894+
Ethnicity (Cajun)							-1.375	5.750
Constant	113.484	5.463	90.385	3.422	112.874	10.716	120.538	13.821
R ²	0.009		0.002		0.017		0.022	

+ $p < .10$.

* $p < .05$.

lower WTP in general (and for incarceration and rehabilitation as well).

Discussion

This study examined the public's WTP for rehabilitation versus incarceration in response to serious juvenile crime. Designed to overcome limitations from extant research and to replicate and build upon a previous study that was limited to one locale, the current analysis of over two thousand responses to vignettes gathered from residents in four states that differed with regard to their demographics, political orientation, and juvenile crime problems, generated several findings of interest.

First, when informed that rehabilitation was as effective as incarceration, the public was willing to pay nearly 20 percent more in additional taxes annually for programs that offered rehabilitative services to serious juvenile offenders than to pay for longer periods of incarceration. This was observed for the entire sample, and in three out of four states surveyed (the exception was Louisiana). Further, these results held after controlling for several demographic characteristics associated with crime attitudes more generally.

The results were consistent with public opinion surveys in general, which have found more public support for rehabilitation than politicians believe was the case. The added value of the present study was that this general trend was found using a WTP methodology that was thought to more accurately gauge public support for various policy alternatives than conventional polling, and the results were replicated across several different locales, each with unique crime/political pressures.

One criticism of the WTP approach to assessing public opinion was that the actual dollar amounts generated through the method may not be accurate, because respondents were forced to select among predetermined responses. Some individuals who indicated a WTP of \$200 in additional taxes may have been willing to pay even more, but because respondents were not pressed beyond this amount, it was difficult to discern the size of this group, as well as how their responses would have differed had different dollar amounts been used to anchor the response categories. Moreover, because the respondents knew they were answering a hypothetical question, their responses may have differed from what they would have said if a genuine referendum were held. All of this is to suggest caution against over-interpreting and over-generalizing the study's results as they were based on perceptions and hypothetical dollars.

It must be remembered however, that the absolute dollar amounts were less important than the relative amounts. Although the true

dollar amount that taxpayers were willing to pay for either policy may be uncertain, participants were willing to pay more for rehabilitation than for incarceration if each delivered the same result. This finding, together with evidence that incarceration was substantially more costly than rehabilitation (at least five times more costly, according to some estimates), supported the conclusion that the returns per dollar spent on rehabilitation were a better value than the returns on incarceration. Indeed, it was likely that support for rehabilitation would likely have been even stronger if respondents had been told that at least five offenders could be provided with services for the same price as incarcerating just one of them.

Second, program benefits calculations indicated that in three of the four states, the addition of rehabilitation yielded a higher dollar amount in program benefits than the addition of incarceration time. The difference between the anticipated program benefits associated with rehabilitation compared to incarceration ranged from \$120 million (Illinois) to \$54 million (Washington). In Louisiana, program benefits were calculated to be \$7 million more for incarceration than rehabilitation.

Third, analyses also indicated that the cost-benefit ratio was higher for rehabilitation compared to incarceration in all four states, but varied somewhat in magnitude across each of the four states. The benefit-cost ratios for rehabilitation were highest in Illinois and Washington, while the benefit-cost ratios for incarceration were lowest in Pennsylvania and Washington.

In total, the results challenge the view held by many that the public opposes rehabilitation and favors incarceration of young offenders. Instead, the public appeared concerned about youth crime and wanted to reduce its incidence, and was ready to support rehabilitative programs as a means of accomplishing that end, so long as such programs were of demonstrated effectiveness (Cullen et al., 1983; Greenwood, 2006). Given the lack of consensus about the long-term effectiveness of incarceration and its attendant costs (Piquero & Blumstein, 2007), careful consideration should be given to a larger discussion on the philosophy guiding correctional policy generally, and with respect to juvenile delinquents in particular.

Appendix A

Rehabilitation scenario

"Currently in _____ juvenile offenders who commit serious crimes such as robbery are put in jail for about one year. Suppose _____ citizens were asked to approve the addition of a rehabilitation program to the sentence for these sorts of crimes.

Similar programs have reduced youth crime by 30 percent. Youths in these programs are also more likely to graduate from high school and get jobs. If the change is approved, this new law would cost your household an additional \$100 per year in taxes.”

Incarceration scenario

“Currently, in _____ juvenile offenders who commit serious crimes such as robbery are put in jail for about one year. Suppose _____ citizens were asked to vote on a change in the law that would increase the sentence for these sorts of crimes by one additional year, making the average length of jail time two years. The additional year will not only impose more punishment but also reduce youth crime by about 30 percent by keeping juvenile offenders off the street for another year. If the change is approved, this new law would cost your household an additional \$100 per year in taxes.”

Notes

1. Specifically, those authors employed the ‘contingent valuation’ methodology, which permits the comparison of respondent’s WTP for competing policy alternatives, and offered several advantages over more conventional polling/survey techniques (Nagin et al., 2006).

2. There were no between-state differences with respect to reasons for ineligibility or refusal patterns and rates.

3. There may be some concern regarding the drop-off from the original RDD total of 29,532 to the final sample of 2,282. A calculation of the overall response rate of 32 percent implies that of these 29,532, only about 7,132 were “eligible.” About two-thirds of those who were eligible refused to respond. The Council of American Survey Research Organizations has a standard method for estimating the ‘eligible sample’ and hence the response rate that allows for dropping unusable numbers such as business or fax machines; however, it does not allow for dropping those whose answering machine picks up, are never home, etc. Thus, some may consider the underlying response rate to be less than 32 percent. The Cohen et al. (2004) study claimed a response rate of 58 percent using the method of this study when comparing only those who answered the phone to those who responded, and a 43 percent response rate when including all ‘eligible’ respondents (including those who did not answer the phone, etc.). A 32 percent response rate, while not ideal, was acceptable, especially given the similarity in the demographics of the sample to the state-specific demographics, as well as the replication of study findings over time in Pennsylvania. Still, given the growing use of cell phones and the fact that more and more respondents are now outside the sampling frame, this was a concern.

4. Figures referencing the effectiveness of rehabilitation were obtained from Lipsey’s (1992) meta-analysis and were carried over to the rehabilitation vignettes for comparison purposes.

5. These amounts may underestimate some participants’ WTP for rehabilitation or incarceration. Presumably, there were people who would spend more than \$200 (the highest figure offered as an option for the rehabilitation and incarceration scenarios) and there were people who might spend somewhere between \$0 and \$50 (anyone who says ‘no’ to \$50 was scored as being willing to spend nothing). Thus, the estimates were conservative because it was only known that respondents would be willing to pay ‘at least’ XX dollars. Other approaches could use the mid-point as a WTP.

6. WTP estimates for rehabilitation and incarceration were also compared within each of the four states, the results of which indicated that the average WTP across the two conditions varied significantly in three of the four states. In Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Washington, respondents were significantly more likely to be willing to spend a higher amount of dollars to fund a rehabilitation-oriented program for juvenile offenders than to fund an incarceration-oriented program. Although respondents in Louisiana were slightly more likely to be willing to spend more on incarceration than rehabilitation, the result was not statistically significant.

7. Louisiana’s experience with Hurricane Katrina certainly influenced the number of individuals and households in the state. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2006 American Community Survey indicated that there were 1.56 million households in Louisiana, which was roughly comparable to the 2000 estimate.

8. As noted, the cost estimates were ‘halved.’ While the intent was to be conservative in making comparisons between incarceration and rehabilitation, this may have led to some inaccurate cost-benefit estimates—just as any other set of estimates would, be they original or other alternatives.

9. A reviewer correctly noted that inclusion of indicators of political climate and/or political affiliation, or rates of juvenile crime in Louisiana compared to other states would be important to determine if these somehow accounted for the punitive bend of respondents from this state. Unfortunately, these indicators were unavailable at the individual-level, and given the wide variation that existed not only between but within each of the states (especially regarding the notion that all politics and crime are local), data on politics/crime at that level of specificity were difficult to obtain and the necessary sample size to explore this variation would have had to have been much larger than study resources allowed. Controlling for state in the multivariate model was believed to ‘swoop’ up such state-specific peculiarities, but subsequent research should attempt to obtain more fine-grained data in order to unpack relevant findings.

10. A supplemental analysis was estimated to include state and incarceration as additive effects. Results indicated that the incarceration condition was again significant (in the same manner as shown in Model 1) and it did not alter the effect of the state variables, all of which remained nonsignificant.

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