

A Conversation between **Paul Maslin**

PM: Ed, our May survey uncovered some interesting attitudes about crime in general and youth crime in particular. First, it is still at or near the top of the list as a state problem, and even higher when it comes to Californians' own communities. Second, very few Californians believe, despite recent statistics to the contrary, that the rate of crime or violent crime is going down in their communities.

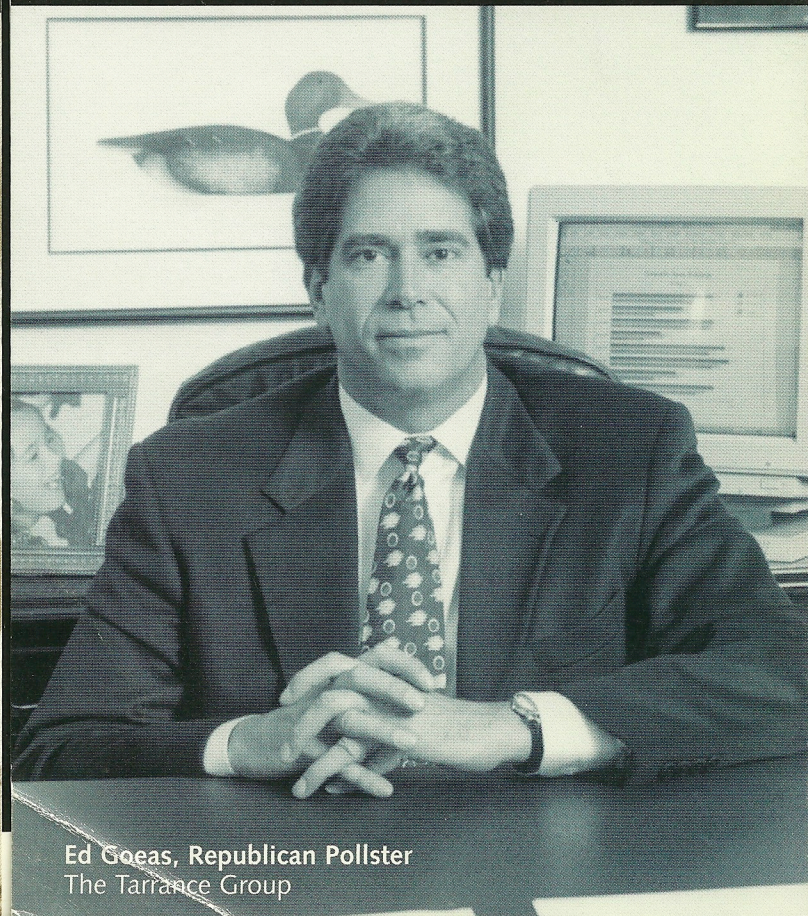


Paul Maslin, Democratic Pollster
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates

Perspectives

and Ed Goeas

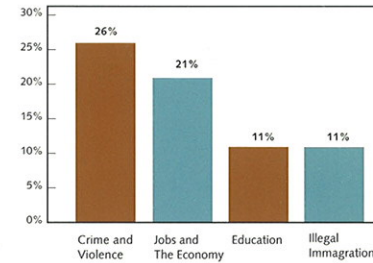
EG: And the data could not be more clear about juvenile crime. By large margins — 2 to 1 — voters believe that the rate of juvenile crime is going up. They think most crimes are committed by young people, and they view kids primarily as perpetrators, not victims of these violent crimes.



Ed Goeas, Republican Pollster
The Tarrance Group

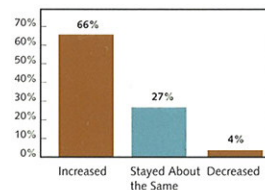
A Conversation between Ed Goeas and Paul Maslin

Voter opinion about the most serious problem facing California.

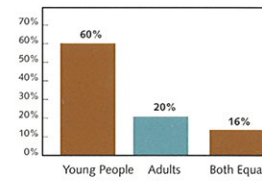


PM: And therefore, not surprisingly, most people believe our current juvenile justice system is too lenient, particularly when it comes to violent or repeat youth offenders. But shouldn't we talk about perceptions vs. reality here?

Voter perception of change in rate of youth violence in past few years.

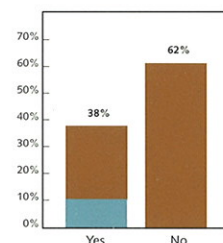


Voter opinion of who commits the most violent crime these days.



EG: Hey, we're in the realm of public opinion where perception is everything! No, actually I agree, because there are important messages for our elected officials and others in some of the realities.

PM: Reality Number One. Most people in our sample had not been personally touched (they or a family member) by crime — any crime, not just violent crime — in the past 5 years. Of those who had, barely one-quarter identified a juvenile as the perpetrator of the crime.



Percent of voters or family members who have been the victim of a crime in the past few years.

Those who identified the perpetrator as a juvenile

EG: The perception of juvenile crime doubles the reality when you compare what Californians report in terms of kids committing crime and what they think. I'll give you another reality. Most people identify the breakdown of the family or the lack of parental discipline as the principal factors leading to youth violence. And as a result, we saw in our focus groups that adults have become more fearful of this violence because they believe the kids committing it are more violent due to a lack of morals or even a conscience about their actions.

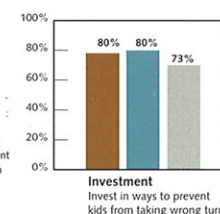
PM: That attitude cuts across all ethnic and socioeconomic groups — Californians believe there is a more violent edge today. But too often in the past Democrats have seen solutions simply in terms of money and programs, and not in the human terms of family and values.

EG: And Republicans see the same solutions as simply a handcuff and a jail cell.

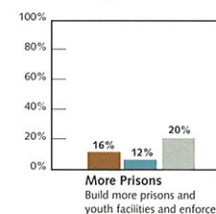
PM: Both sides have to move beyond their biases to try to find a solution here.

EG: I couldn't agree more. And what is also striking about this survey is the willingness of Californians to try change — any change — in the area of prevention to try to ease this problem. Any way we put it, and on any choice we tried, the vast majority of Californians preferred an emphasis on prevention over a strict emphasis on tough sentencing and enforcement. Three-quarters favor prevention over building more prisons; strong majorities are at least somewhat convinced that prevention programs would reduce crime.

Percentage of voters who favor prevention.



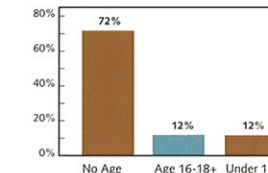
Percentage of voters who favor building more prisons.



PM: I'll admit that the margins and the consistency of this finding surprised even me. But what also surprised

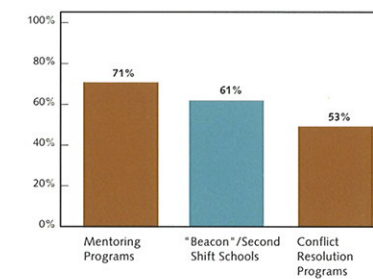
me was the finding that three-quarters of this sample believed there was no age beyond which it is too late to help a kid who has gotten involved in crime, and only 12% would give up on a kid under 16. People believe kids are worth helping — at any time, and any age.

Voter opinion on what age is "too late" to help a young person who has gotten involved in violent crime.



EG: Yes, but you need a stick as well as a carrot. Obviously the violent and repeat offenders need to be dealt with firmly. And you've also got to watch out for the money part of this. If people hear a program — without any validation of its success — they're just going to conclude that it means more money, and guess who pays for that.

PM: But look at the willingness which we found to try programs: 71% thought a Mentoring Program would be effective; 61% for Beacon or Second Shift Schools; 53% for Conflict Resolution.



Percentage of voters who on a scale of 1-7 rated these programs with a 6 or above for effectiveness in preventing juvenile crime.

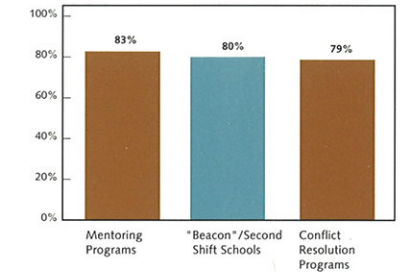
EG: What do those three have in common?

PM: There's a human element in all these programs involving adults and youth working together, with an emphasis on accountability and taking responsibility for one's actions.

EG: That's right. We didn't get into the funding mechanism, but I think people in our survey heard something beyond just the dollar sign in each of these examples — they heard that counseling or discipline or human involvement was present.

PM: Although we did find at least some willingness by a majority of respondents to invest in these programs. And we also learned from our focus groups that the ability to discuss a group or a program that has had some success is very important — it gives necessary validation.

Percentage of voters willing to invest public tax dollars in the following programs.



EG: And also to show an actual success story.

PM: Like a kid who got into trouble and can tell how a specific group or a specific program helped him get straight.

EG: Helped him help himself. People still want the individual to take responsibility for his or her own actions and lives.

PM: But in the end, I happen to believe it is the perceived severity of the problem that's driving this demand for change. People are smart enough to realize that just getting tough won't solve this problem. It is the tough love approach, but you have to have both.

EG: That's right, and it is children, after all, we're talking about. People from Orange County to Oakland, despite their political differences, want to do something to help our kids.

PM: Yeah, in this case, the line about "they're our future, after all" is actually true. And on that a Republican and Democratic pollster can agree.

EG: Agreed.

Paul Maslin, of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates, is a leading public opinion pollster and has served as advisor to many Democrats, including six Presidential candidates, ten U.S. Senators, a dozen big city Mayors, Governors, scores of Congressmen, and state and local officials.

Ed Goeas, head of the Tarrance Group, is a respected Republican pollster who has worked on various presidential congressional and gubernatorial campaigns. He also serves as a pollster for U.S. News & World Report.

Preventing Youth Violence:

A Survey of Public Attitudes in California, was conducted May 5-12, 1996 of 1,000 registered California voters. The survey included 25 questions about youth violence. By accepted polling standards the survey responses are considered to be accurate reflections of statewide voter opinion within a statistical tolerance of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

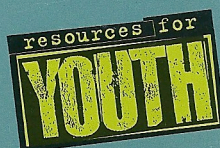
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The Resources for Youth campaign begins with the assumption that youth violence is a problem that affects all of us. While ensuring public safety is a priority, we believe much more can be done to prevent youth violence and crime. Discussion of solutions is often difficult because this issue has become both polarized and politicized. One thing we can all agree on is the need for an honest dialogue. The campaign will provide California policy makers and community leaders with **facts, perspectives, voices** and **strategies** to prevent youth violence and crime so that together we can become resources for our youth.

We hope you will be interested in these perspectives and invite you to send your opinions on preventing youth violence to us.



454 Las Gallinas Avenue, Suite 178
San Rafael, California 94903-3618
T: 415 331-5991
F: 415 331-2969