

Broad Support for Reinstating Pell Grants for People in Prison

Survey Findings | October 2019

A bipartisan team of the Republican polling firm *TargetPoint Consulting* and Democratic polling firm *GQR* conducted a survey in four key Senate battleground states (Iowa, Georgia, Texas and North Carolina).

This survey shows that voters overwhelmingly support reinstating Pell Grants for people in prisons. Convincing majorities in Georgia, Iowa, Texas and North Carolina support this change. Moreover, 39 percent say they would be more likely to support a candidate who supports reinstating Pell Grants, only 15 percent are less likely, and 41 percent would say that it makes no difference.

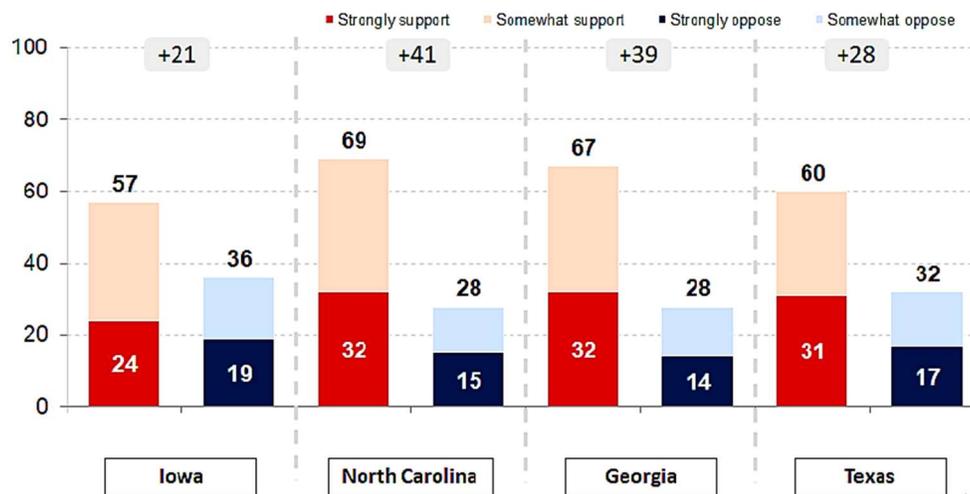
This factsheet summarizes the results of a telephone survey of 800 likely 2020 voters in Iowa, Georgia, Texas and North Carolina (200 interviews per state). The survey carries an overall margin of error of +/- 3.46 percentage points and a state-level margin of error of +/- 6.93 percentage points.

Main Finding

Voters across these states support allowing people in prisons to use Pell Grants for post-high school education. Support reaches 69 percent in North Carolina, but this idea also generates convincing margins in Texas, Iowa and Georgia.

Figure 1. Support for reinstating Pell Grants for people in prisons by state

As you may know, Pell Grants, which are federal subsidies for education after high school, are currently unavailable for people in state or federal prisons. Would you support or oppose allowing people in prison to use Pell Grants for post-high school education such as college-level courses or skills training in things like plumbing and welding?

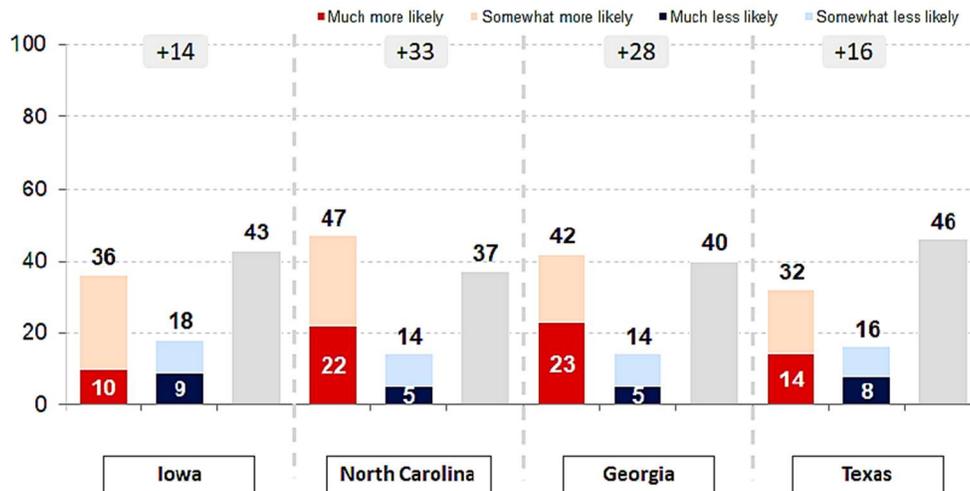


Support at this level, of course, means support across different demographic groups. White voters and voters of color, college and non-college as well as men and women all embrace this change. Even Republican and lean Republican voters divide fairly evenly on this issue (48 percent favor, 47 percent opposed).

Candidates supporting this change could benefit electorally. Across the states, a 39 percent plurality of voters describe themselves as more likely to support a candidate for U.S. Senate who supports this change, just 15 percent are less likely, and a plurality say it will make no difference either way.

Figure 2. Likelihood of voting for a U.S. Senate candidate supporting Pell Grants

If a candidate for the U.S. Senate supports allowing people in prisons to use Pell Grants for post-high school education such as college-level courses or skills training in things like plumbing and welding, would you be more likely to support him or her, or less likely to support him or her, or would it make no difference either way?



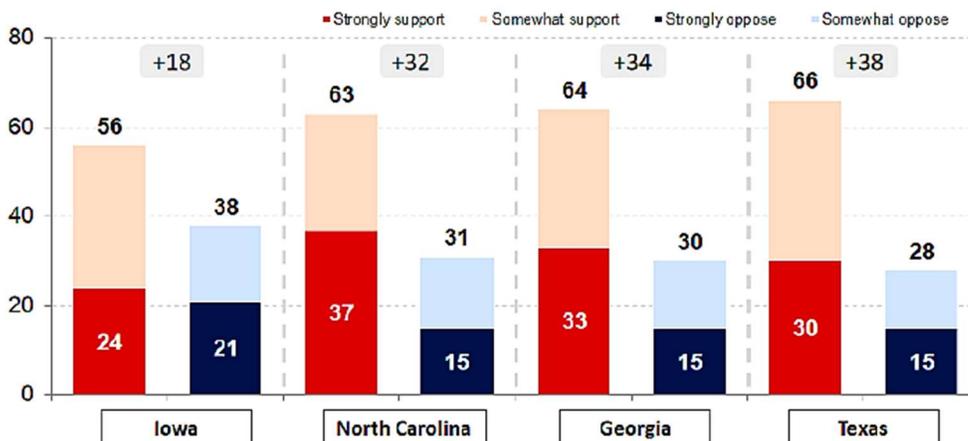
Notably, advocates of this change bring more intensity to this issue than opponents. A 57 percent majority of supporters of allowing people in prison to have access to Pell Grants are more likely to support a candidate who shares this position; only 40 percent of opponents are less likely to support a candidate who supports allowing people in prison access to Pell Grants (just 19 percent much less likely).

This majority holds up after both sides make their case. In this survey, we allowed both sides to make their best case for their respective position. After voters hear these arguments, support is unchanged.

Figure 3. Informed vote: support for Pell Grants

Supporters of allowing people in prisons to use Pell Grants say that 90 percent of the current people in prison will be released whether they are ready for work or not. Students who go through post-high school education programs like plumbing, welding, and college courses are 43 percent less likely to commit another crime and end up back in prison. None of the money used by people in prisons would take away money for Pell Grants used by other students.

Opponents for allowing people in prisons to use Pell Grants say that many families fall into deep debt to pay for college, and people who commit crimes should not be rewarded with money for college courses. They also say that this country has lots of problems right now. Rather than spending money on free education for people in prisons, we should be rebuilding roads and bridges, improving health care, and making college more affordable for everyone.



Voters understand that most people in prison will return to their communities and that they need education and work-force skills to be able to provide for themselves and their families and to avoid repeating their mistakes of the past. This common sense conclusion drives support for reinstating Pell Grants for people in prison in these battleground states.