

Public confidence in the New South Wales criminal justice system: 2019 update

Elizabeth Moore

SUMMARY

NUMBER 227 | JUNE 2020

BACKGROUND

This bulletin reports the results of the fourth wave of BOCSAR's 'Confidence in the criminal justice system' survey. The survey was administered to a random sample of 2,000 NSW residents in 2019.

Previous research suggests that higher levels of knowledge of the criminal justice system (CJS) are associated with more confidence. Confidence in the CJS is critical to the effective functioning of the system as a whole. Improving and maintaining public confidence should be an ongoing priority for criminal justice agencies.

The specific aims of the current study were to:

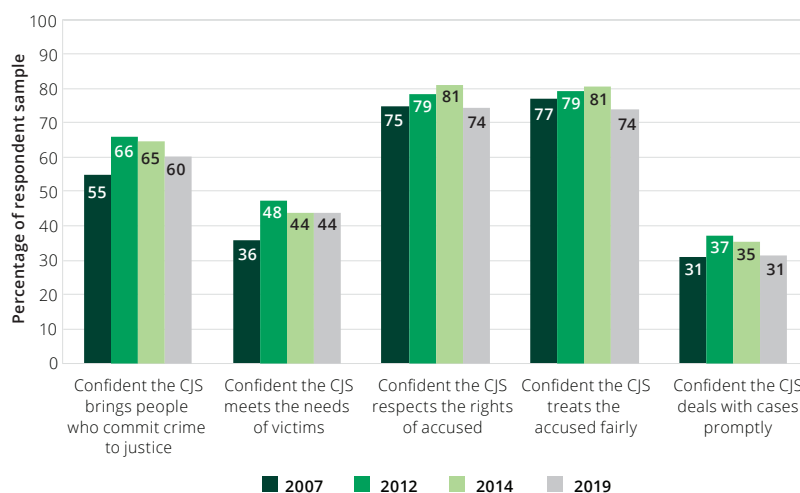
1. examine the level of public confidence in the NSW CJS in 2019;
2. explore variation in confidence levels across the NSW population in 2019;
3. assess changes in public confidence, views on sentencing and knowledge of crime and sentencing outcomes from 2007 to 2019.

KEYWORDS

- criminal justice system
- sentencing
- public confidence
- knowledge
- repeated cross-sectional survey
- police
- courts

KEY FINDINGS

Confidence in the criminal justice system by survey year, 2007-2019



The 2019 data suggest NSW residents are:

- confident that the CJS respects the rights of the accused, treats the accused fairly and brings people who commit crimes to justice, but believe sentencing is too lenient;
- less confident that the CJS meets the needs of victims or deals with cases promptly; and
- more confident in the police than the criminal courts.

In 2019, reading/watching the news was associated with more confidence that the CJS brings people who commit crime to justice, whereas listening to talk-back radio was associated with less confidence on this CJS measure and was also associated with harsher views on sentencing.

From 2007 to 2019, overall confidence levels did not improve, views on sentencing fluctuated, and there were only modest improvements in knowledge of crime trends and estimates of conviction and imprisonment rates.

CONCLUSION

While the small improvement in knowledge of crime trends is encouraging, it seems to have made very little impact on levels of confidence in the CJS.