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A 2014 NCSC Public Opinion Survey
METHODOLOGY

WHAT: NCSC nationwide telephone survey

WHO: Conducted by GBA Strategies

WHEN: November 12–16, 2014

POLLED: 1000 Registered Voters

STATS: MOE +/- 2.8% 19 times out of 20
The public worries that politics undermines the impartiality of the court system. Courts remain the most trusted branch of government. Court users express confidence in fairness of proceedings, but have doubts about customer service and job performance. There is a strong demand for greater availability of online services.
The public is more optimistic about the work of the state courts than in 2012.

Q: “Please state how well each of the following words or phrases describes the state courts.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2012 %</th>
<th>2014 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fair &amp; impartial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide good customer service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide equal justice to all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represent a good investment of tax</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

percent saying well or very well
Voters also see improvements in procedural fairness attributes since 2012 survey.

**FIGURE 2**

Q: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treat people with dignity &amp; respect</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are unbiased in their case decisions</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen carefully to those appearing before them</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take the needs of people into account</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q: “Regardless of the outcome, were you satisfied with the fairness of the process in your dealings with the court system?”

Those who report direct interaction with the courts are satisfied...

**FIGURE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>72%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfied</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: “How would you rate the job being done by courts in (state)?”

...But are more likely to give lower ratings on job performance and customer service.

**FIGURE 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Direct Contact</th>
<th>Direct Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent/Good</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair/Poor</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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FIGURE 4, CONT’D

...But are more likely to give lower ratings on job performance and customer service.

Q: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”

Percent saying they strongly or somewhat agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>No Direct Contact</th>
<th>Direct Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treat people with dignity and respect</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are unbiased in their case decisions</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen carefully to those appearing before them</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take the needs of people into account</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed to protecting individual and civil rights</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve as an appropriate check on other branches of government</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Voters are split on whether the courts are doing enough with technology.

**Statement 1**
“(State) courts are effectively using technology to lower costs and improve customer service.”

**Statement 2**
“(State) courts are not effectively using technology to improve their own operations or how they interact with the people they serve.”

Don’t Know
The public is willing to conduct court business online.

**Q:** “If you had business with the courts and this service was available online, how likely would you be to use it?”

- **Access court records:**
  - Over 65: 55%
  - Overall: 77%
  - Under 40: 86%

- **Pay a fine or fee:**
  - Over 65: 55%
  - Overall: 76%
  - Under 40: 86%

- **Submit questions on procedure to court staff:**
  - Over 65: 54%
  - Overall: 75%
  - Under 40: 83%

Percent saying they would definitely or probably use the service if available online.
Voters are wary that politics is undermining the impartiality of the system.

Statement 1
“Judges in (state) courts are selected based on their qualifications and experience.”

Statement 2
“Judges in (state) courts are there because of personal connections or political influence.”

Don’t Know

Statement 1
“Judges in (state) courts make decisions based on an objective review of facts and the law.”

Statement 2
“Judges in (state) courts make decisions based more on their own beliefs and political pressure.”

Don’t Know
In the nine states with contested partisan elections for state high courts, the 46 percent who agree with the “political pressure” statement rises to 51 percent.

Voters are wary that politics is undermining the impartiality of the system.
The public does not subscribe to the myth that judges are underworked...

Q: “How many hours each week do you think judges in (state) courts spend on duties directly related to their judicial responsibilities?”

- 40 or more hours/week
- < 40 hours/week
- Don’t know

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FIGURE 9

...But there is virtually no public support for a campaign on judicial salaries.

Q: “Do you believe judges in (state) courts are paid too much, not enough, or about the right amount?”

- About Right: 58%
- Too Much: 23%
- Don’t Know: 17%
- Not Enough: 5%

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Voters have a reasonable understanding of how much state judges earn.

Q: “How much do you estimate judges in (state) courts are paid annually?”

- < 100K: 28%
- 100K-200K: 45%
- 200K or more: 10%
- Don’t Know: 17%

11% of state supreme court judges earn more than $200K per year — NCSC Survey of Judicial Salaries
The cost of hiring an attorney is perceived as the greatest barrier to access to justice...

Q: “If you were considering taking a case to court, would this make you less likely to go to court?”

- The cost of hiring an attorney: 39% + 32% = 71%
- Time away from job/family: 30% + 30% = 60%
- Court fees: 26% + 31% = 57%
...and the courts are not seen as doing enough to help people navigate the system without a lawyer.

Statement 1
“(State) courts are **effectively** providing information for individuals without attorneys.”

Statement 2
“(State) courts are **not doing enough** for individuals without attorneys.”

Don’t Know