CRIME SURVIVORS SPEAK

THE FIRST-EVER NATIONAL SURVEY OF VICTIMS' VIEWS ON SAFETY AND JUSTICE

ALLIANCE FOR SAFETY AND JUSTICE

ABOUT ALLIANCE FOR SAFETY AND JUSTICE

Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ), a project of the Tides Center, is a national organization that aims to win new safety priorities in states across the country. ASJ partners with leaders and advocates to advance state reform through networking, coalition building, research, education and advocacy. ASJ also brings together diverse crime survivors to advance policies that help communities most harmed by crime and violence. ASJ is the sister organization of Californians for Safety and Justice, also a project of Tides Center.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is made possible through the philanthropic support provided to Alliance for Safety and Justice by: Ford Foundation, Future Justice Fund, Open Philanthropy Project, Public Welfare Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and Rosenberg Foundation. Thank you for making our work possible.

ASJ also leaned on the experience of its sister organization, Californians for Safety and Justice (CSJ), in producing this report. Many thanks are owed to CSJ staff and team for their dedication and ongoing work to elevate the voices of crime survivors in policy debates on criminal justice and safety. Similarly, ASJ was able to learn from CSJ's extensive network of crime survivors and victims, Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice and the Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice Leadership Team. Thank you for your leadership. Additionally, ASJ has learned tremendously from our partners in VOCA advocacy, Equal Justice USA and Common Justice. Thank you for your partnership.

Many people played a role in developing and executing this work. ASJ would like to especially thank Seiji Carpenter at David Binder Research for his invaluable contributions. ASJ would also like to thank attorney and victims' issues expert Heather Warnken for her thoughtful feedback and constant support.

Finally, and most importantly, we would like to thank all of the people who have told us their stories and allowed us to learn from their experiences as survivors of crime. We owe a great deal to those who have allowed themselves to be profiled in this report and who speak out with great courage and conviction. Thank you deeply.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is no more important function of our safety and justice systems than protecting crime victims and those who are at-risk of becoming a victim of crime.

Despite this foundational goal, few safety and justice policy debates are informed by a comprehensive examination of the experiences and views of the nation's diverse crime survivors.

The United States is in the midst of a significant shift in criminal justice policy. For the first time in decades, criminal justice practitioners, lawmakers, and the general public are rethinking sentencing laws, prison spending, and the best ways to address crime and violence.

There has never been a more important time to investigate and elevate the perspectives of those most commonly victimized by violence and crime. If new approaches to safety and justice do not incorporate the voices of crime survivors, this new era of reform risks failing to deliver on the breakthrough the country needs.

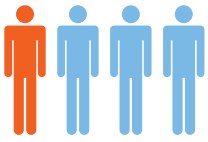
This changing landscape presents an important opportunity to correct misperceptions that have driven public policy in the past, and gather new information that can help shape smarter approaches to safety and justice.

To begin filling the gap in available and representative data on who crime victims are and their policy priorities, in April of 2016, Alliance for Safety and Justice commissioned the first-of-its-kind National Survey of Victims' Views. This report describes the findings from this survey and points to opportunities for further research and reform to advance polices that align with the needs and perspectives of victims.

Perhaps to the surprise of some, victims overwhelmingly prefer criminal justice approaches that prioritize rehabilitation over punishment and strongly prefer investments in crime prevention and treatment to more spending on prisons and jails. These views are not always accurately reflected in the media or in state capitols and should be considered in policy debates.

KEY FINDINGS

VICTIMS' EXPERIENCES

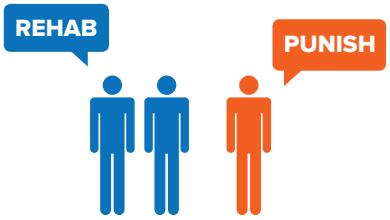


One in four people have been a victim of crime in the past 10 years, and roughly half of those have been the victim of a violent crime

- **Victims of crime are more likely to be: low-income, young, people of color**
- **Violent crime victims are four times as likely to be *repeat* crime victims** of four or more crimes
- **Victims of crime experience significant challenges in recovery and healing** — eight in 10 report experiencing at least one symptom of trauma
- **More than four in 10 victims have worried for their safety** due to witnessing violence or another crime

Two out of three victims did not receive help following the incident, and those who did were far more likely to receive it from family and friends than the criminal justice system

VICTIMS' VIEWS ON PUBLIC POLICY



By a 2 to 1 margin, victims prefer that the criminal justice system focus more on rehabilitating people who commit crimes than punishing them

By a margin of nearly 3 to 1, victims believe that prison makes people more likely to commit crimes than to rehabilitate them

By a margin of 7 to 1, victims prefer increased investments in crime prevention and programs for at-risk youth over more investments in prisons and jails

BY A MARGIN OF

3 TO 1

victims prefer holding people accountable through options beyond prison, such as rehabilitation, mental health treatment, drug treatment, community supervision, or community service

By a margin of 15 to 1, victims prefer increased investments in schools and education over more investments in prisons and jails

By a margin of 10 to 1, victims prefer increased investments in job creation over more investments in prisons and jails

By a margin of 7 to 1, victims prefer increased investments in mental health treatment over more investments in prisons and jails

6 IN 10

victims prefer shorter prison sentences and more spending on prevention and rehabilitation to prison sentences that keep people incarcerated for as long as possible

By a margin of 4 to 1, victims prefer increased investments in drug treatment over more investments in prisons and jails

By a margin of 2 to 1, victims prefer increased investments in community supervision, such as probation and parole, over more investments in prisons and jails

VICTIMS' VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF PROSECUTORS

Seven in 10 victims prefer that prosecutors focus on solving neighborhood problems and stopping repeat crimes through rehabilitation, even if it means fewer convictions and prison sentences

Six in 10 victims prefer that prosecutors consider victims' opinions on what would help them recover from the crime, even when victims do not want long prison sentences

VICTIMS' VIEWS CONSISTENT ACROSS DEMOGRAPHICS

For each of the questions above, there is **majority or plurality support across demographic** groups, including age, gender, race and ethnicity, and political party affiliation

For each of the questions above, there is **majority or plurality support among both crime victims overall and victims of violent crimes,** including the most serious crimes such as rape or murder of a family member

The following report includes more findings and supplemental data from national sources to illuminate who is impacted by crime, how they are experiencing the criminal justice system, and what their views are on safety and justice policy.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Advancing safety and justice for crime victims involves holding individuals who commit crimes accountable, as well as stopping cycles of crime and repeat victimization. Victims also need pathways to recovery, including support to overcome the physical, emotional and financial consequences of crime.

Currently, the most comprehensive information available about crime victims is the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics.

The NCVS is an annual data collection from a nationally representative sample of more than 90,000 U.S. households and nearly 160,000 people age 12 and older. The annual NCVS report is invaluable for understanding many facets of victimization, including unreported crime.

The April 2016 National Survey of Victims' Views helps fill some of the gaps in knowledge that remain, in particular, victims' views on safety and justice policy and the ways in which victims experience the criminal justice system.

We also hope this survey contributes to a greater understanding of crime victim issues and perspectives. None of the nation's 50 states regularly conduct state-level analyses of victimization or victims' experiences and perspectives. This is a profound gap, particularly considering that the majority of criminal justice policy-making occurs at the state level.[1]

The National Survey of Victims' Views was conducted by David Binder Research[2], which contacted a nationally representative sample of 3,165 people across the country, and, from that pool, identified and interviewed over 800 victims. Unless otherwise cited, the data contained in this report reflect findings from the survey and the responses of this broad cross section of crime survivors from around the country.

WHO ARE CRIME VICTIMS?

Crime in the United States impacts large numbers of people every year.

In 2014 alone, there were more than 20 million victimizations affecting more than 13 million people in the United States.[3] In other words, eight percent of all households experienced a property crime and more than 3 million people were the victim of at least one violent crime.[4]

To go beyond a one-year snapshot, our National Survey of Victims' Views utilized a longer 10-year reference period to incorporate people who are repeatedly victimized, as well as a broader cross-section of those who occasionally experience crime.

Survey findings indicate that **ONE IN FOUR** people have been crime victims in the past 10 years, and half of those were victims of a violent crime.

Survivors of violent crime are the most likely to experience repeat victimization

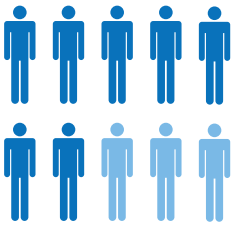
The group of people that experiences crime is as diverse as the United States itself, and violence impacts people of all walks of life.

However, according to national data, the strongest predictor of victimization is having previously been a victim of crime.[5] This is known as repeat victimization.

According to the survey, repeat crime victims bear a sharply disproportionate share of the impact of crime and violence. People who have been the victim of a violent crime are more than four times as likely to have been victimized four or more times. More than one-third (35%) of victims of a violent crime have been repeatedly victimized.

VICTIMS OF **VIOLENT CRIME** ARE **4X** AS LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE **REPEAT VICTIMIZATION**

Nearly everyone who reports being the victim of a violent crime also reports being the victim of a property crime. Fewer than four percent of victims report experiencing only violent crime.



7 OUT OF 10

VICTIMS SURVEYED REPORT BEING THE VICTIM OF MULTIPLE CRIMES

People of color experience the most crime

Both the NCVS and our survey show higher rates of victimization for people of color. The survey results indicate that people of color[6] are 15 percent more likely to be victims of crime. This finding is supported by the NCVS — in 2014, black people were nearly one-third more likely to have been victims of violent crime than white people.[7]

Young people experience the most crime

The largest disparities in victimization relate to a person's age. According to NCVS, young people are the most common victims, with 18–24 year-olds experiencing crime at nearly twice the rate of any other age group.[8] These young people are also most likely to live in an urban area, where residents are 50 percent more likely to experience crime than their peers in rural or suburban areas.[9] These findings align with survey results showing that people under the age of 40 and people living in urban areas are more likely to be victims of crime.

People in low-income communities experience the most crime

There are also large disparities across economic groups. The results of one study found that the rate of victimization among individuals with family incomes of less than $15,000 was over three times the rate of those with family incomes of $75,000 or more.[10] This study aligns with survey findings that people who report making less than $50,000 or describe themselves as poor are more likely to be victims of crime.

ASWAD, CALIFORNIA

On Aug. 24, 2009, I had finished college and was offered a contract to play professional basketball in Europe. My dreams were coming true. That evening, as I was leaving a convenience store, two men tried to rob me. Before I knew it, I was lying on the ground, shot twice in my back. I nearly died. Weeks in the hospital turned into months of rehabilitation. Those bullets ended my basketball career.

I didn't know what I needed to heal from the trauma: how to access the physical and emotional support necessary to fully recover. It was overwhelming just to pay medical bills, handle inquiries from law enforcement and return to work.

At times, I have asked, "Why me?" But five out of 10 men in my family had been shot, and I've lost 40 friends to gun violence, including my best friend when we were only 10.

While recovering, I decided to replace despair and resentment with action. I made a commitment to stop cycles of violence that for decades have plagued too many communities of color, even while spending on prisons skyrocketed.

There's no shortage of resources; it's that too little is invested in helping victims or our hardest hit communities. I'm committed to changing that. I went back to school for my masters in social work and now work to ensure that community groups best positioned to serve our most vulnerable communities can access the resources they need.

When I see the scars on my body from that night in 2009, I often think I should not be here. But when I look at the faces of survivors I now work with, I am reminded of what I am here to do.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF CRIME ON VICTIMS?

Crime affects feelings of safety for victims

Survey findings reveal that victims are more likely than non-victims to feel unsafe in their communities. While five in 10 people who have not experienced crime feel very safe in the area where they live, only three in 10 victims of crime report feeling very safe in their community. For victims of violent crime, the rate of feeling unsafe is even higher. One in four victims of violent crime feel unsafe in their neighborhood — nearly 2.5 times the number of non-victims.

In addition to feeling less safe, victims also experience a diminished quality of life as a result of crime. Four in 10 victims report that their lives are affected by crime in the area where they live. Among those who have been victims of a violent crime, more than half feel the impact of neighborhood crime on their lives.

Women, people of color, and residents of urban areas feel most impacted by crime

There are notable differences in individuals' experience of safety among people of different racial backgrounds or income levels. Low-income people are nearly half as likely (38%) than high-income people (71%) to feel very safe. Black and Latino people are less likely than white people to feel very safe (38 and 40%, respectively, compared to 50%), and people from urban areas are less likely (37%) than people living in suburban (45%) or rural (56%) areas.

These differences are magnified for women, who across the board feel less safe than their male counterparts. For example, whereas only 34 percent of Latina women and 35 percent of black women feel very safe in their community, more than half (54%) of white men feel very safe. Men from rural areas are the most likely to feel very safe (60%) and women from urban areas are the least likely to feel very safe (31%).

White victims surveyed are less likely to report that their lives are impacted by crime (23%) than Latino victims (38%) or African American victims (43%). People from urban areas, people in low-income communities and people with less educational attainment are all also more likely to report feeling affected by crime than their rural or higher-income or higher-educational-attainment peers.

ONLY **3 IN 10** VICTIMS OF CRIME **REPORT FEELING VERY SAFE** IN THEIR COMMUNITY.

4 IN 10 VICTIMS REPORT **THAT THEIR LIVES ARE AFFECTED BY CRIME** IN THE AREA **WHERE THEY LIVE.**

Crime is a traumatic experience for victims

Crime is a traumatic experience for nearly everyone who has been a victim. Sixty-three percent of crime survivors overall and eight out of 10 victims of violent crime describe their experience as traumatic.

8 IN 10 **EXPERIENCED AT LEAST ONE SYMPTOM OF TRAUMA.**

Below are some of the ways in which crime harms the physical and mental well-being of those surveyed:

- 8 in 10 experienced at least one symptom of trauma
- 2 in 10 victims were injured or experienced medical problems from the incident
- 6 in 10 experienced stress (65%)
- More than half experienced anxiety (51%) or feelings of fear (51%)
- 4 in 10 experienced difficulty sleeping (41%) after the incident

This is especially true for repeat crime victims. According to national data, people who are repeatedly victimized are more likely than other crime victims to suffer mental health problems, such as higher levels of depression, anxiety and symptoms related to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).[11]

Victims experience additional trauma from witnessing other crime incidents

For many victims, the harmful impacts of crime and violence are compounded by experiences they have witnessing crime and violence against others. The majority of crime victims, in particular victims of violent crime, have witnessed other crime incidents, beyond their own victimization.

Six out of 10 victims surveyed have witnessed someone else being hit or assaulted in the past 10 years. For victims of violent crime, three out of four victims surveyed have witnessed someone else being hit or assaulted.

6 IN 10 **HAVE WITNESSED SOMEONE ELSE BEING HIT OR ASSAULTED IN THE PAST 10 YEARS.**

The compounded traumatic impacts of both being a direct victim of crime and being exposed to crime and violence against others indicates that victims living in communities experiencing concentrated crime suffer greater levels of chronic trauma than victims who do not. Four in 10 crime victims who have witnessed violence have feared for their safety as a result.

JOHN, CONNECTICUT

Over the course of three years, I was robbed once and burglarized twice at my apartment. I was physically assaulted during the robbery. The physical wounds didn't take long to heal, but the mental and emotional scars stayed with me for many years. I avoided using the front door where I was accosted, and I was skittish of people hanging out in my neighborhood.

The police never caught the men who robbed me. They drove me around and tried to pin the crime on an innocent person. I refused to identify the wrong person. Instead, I channeled my feeling of helplessness into creating an environment of safety where I lived. I formed a safety committee in my building. We installed handlebars to quickly close the doors behind us, trimmed the bushes and built community among each other.

Other than talking with friends and family, I didn't receive support to deal with the aftermath. These incidents occurred more than a dozen years ago, but when I think about them, they still trigger traumatic memories and feelings. I don't wish for retribution, but I do want to help come up with solutions that can provide support services for victims to help them heal.

IS THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM MEETING VICTIMS' NEEDS?

The traumatic impacts of being a victim of violence and crime extend to individuals' personal, familial and professional lives, and, left unaddressed, can have severe and long-term impacts on the well-being and stability of victims.

When crime is reported to law enforcement, the criminal justice system plays a critical role in facilitating medical, economic, and emotional recovery for the crime victim.

Despite this important role, few crime survivors indicate that the criminal justice system provided assistance in addressing their victimization.

Most victims do not receive help to recover from crime

Two out of three victims surveyed received no help following the incident.

Of those that receive help, it is not through the criminal justice system

Of the victims that do report receiving help, the majority received it from family and friends or the hospital, not the criminal justice system.

- 40 percent received recovery help from family and friends
- 35 percent received recovery help from hospitals

Two out of three victims surveyed received no help following the incident

Only one in 10 victims received assistance from a district attorney or prosecutor's office, and one in four received help from a law enforcement agency.

National data indicates that victims frequently do not report crime to the authorities. According to NCVS, more than half of violent crimes go unreported (54%). Other research suggests that bystanders, relatives or acquaintances, not the victims, report a substantial portion of reported violent crime.[12]

People are even less likely to report certain property crimes (e.g., motor vehicle theft, burglary and theft), and nationally about three-fifths (63%) of these crimes go unreported.[13]

The survey indicates that many of these crimes are unreported due to a belief that the criminal justice system won't help. The number one and two reasons for not reporting cited by respondents, respectively, were feeling that the police wouldn't do anything and prosecution and courts wouldn't do anything.

LUZ, NEW YORK

I am an adult survivor of multiple sexual assaults as a child and adolescent, incest and rape, by a family member and family friend, with the first assault taking place when I was six. At 10 years old, I began to engage in risky behavior that lasted for more than a decade as a way to cope. I became a truant, ran away from home and turned to drugs and sex to disassociate myself from my traumatic experiences.

Fortunately, at the same time, I had some people who loved, cared for and protected me. One brother mothered me in a way our own mother couldn't. A cousin mentored me and helped me get summer jobs and introduced me to a program where I developed youth leadership skills with other young people throughout NYC.

After leaving my hometown of Harlem, New York, at 19, I began my road to healing and stopped taking drugs. Several years later, through working with an agency that advocates an end to sexual violence, I began to realize that I was a survivor. This motivated me to seek support for my experiences. I received culturally appropriate therapy for about 15 years, which helped me become the person I am today at 49 - a mom of three, a wife, an advocate to end violence against women, especially child sexual abuse, and a movement leader.

As a youth, I never called Child Protective Services or law enforcement to deal with the perpetrators. I don't think knowing the perpetrators are in prison would have helped me heal and it might have added more trauma in my life because I would have had to testify against them, leaving me with the burden of breaking up my family unit. What I do want is for them to receive the help they need to see the impact of their actions and to value women and children, and to learn to love and be loved in healthy and appropriate ways.

For young people, a lack of support can have particularly acute impacts

The lack of access to recovery supports has a negative impact on victims' future stability, and this is particularly acute for those at most risk of being a victim of crime: young people.

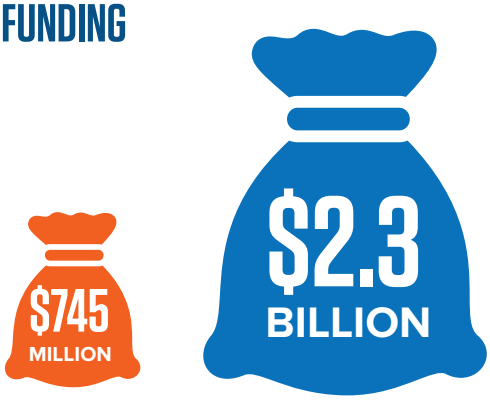
Youth and young adults between the ages of 18–24 are particularly vulnerable following victimization and can suffer from the long-term impacts of unaddressed trauma, such as difficulty with school, work, relationships and poor physical health. They are also the most at-risk for later becoming involved in criminal activity if their needs go unmet.[14]

HOW ARE MOST VICTIM SERVICES FUNDED?

The largest source of funding for victim services is a federal block grant program authorized by the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). VOCA funding, which states allocate to programs that provide direct services for victims, increased from $745 million in 2014 to $2.3 billion in 2015.[15]

Other programs that help victims recover from the physical and emotional toll of crime — grief counseling, clinical therapy, trauma support — are provided by state and local governments, but no reliable data on the scale of those investments is readily available for analysis.

VOCA FUNDING



WHAT ARE THE

PERSPECTIVES OF VICTIMS

ON THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND PUBLIC SAFETY POLICIES?

In addition to interviewing crime victims about their experiences with crime and the criminal justice system, the National Survey on Victims' Views also collected data about victims' views on criminal justice and public safety policy.

After decades of unprecedented growth in incarceration rates and prison spending across the United States, the nation is in the midst of a transition. For the first time, lawmakers of all stripes and the general public agree that the nation needs a new direction. Concerns about waste in the justice system, depleted state budgets, the racially disparate impacts of incarceration and the lack of effectiveness of over-incarceration have led many to seek new approaches to safety and justice.

In this era of change, it is important to re-examine the underlying assumptions that contributed to unprecedented growth in incarceration and prison spending. Many of the shifts toward increased incarceration were accompanied by a highly politicized debate about the best way to protect public safety. In many state capitols and in the media, victims of crime are at times portrayed as strongly favoring tough sentencing policies and maintaining high prison rates.

Given the large impact of anecdotal representations of victims' views on public safety debates, this survey sought to discern the perspectives of a more comprehensive and representative group of crime victims.

Perhaps to the surprise of some, the National Survey on Victims' Views found that the **OVERWHELMING MAJORITY** of crime victims believe that the criminal justice system relies too heavily on incarceration, and strongly **PREFER INVESTMENTS IN PREVENTION AND TREATMENT** to more spending on prisons and jails.

These findings, described in more detail below, hold true across all demographic groups, including race, gender, age, income and political party affiliation.[16] They also hold true for victims of violent crime as well as nonviolent crime.[17]

BY A MARGIN OF NEARLY

3 TO 1

victims believe that prison is more likely to make people commit crimes than to rehabilitate them. Victims are also more likely to believe that the U.S. sends too many people to prison (38%) than too few (29%).

GROWTH IN U.S. INCARCERATION AND PRISON SPENDING

The U.S. prison population grew nearly 700% between 1972 and 2014. More than 2.2 million people are now incarcerated at a cost to taxpayers of more than $80 billion each year.[18] Over the last three decades, lawmakers in all 50 states have adopted stringent mandatory sentencing laws and policies that limit parole eligibility. These changes have increased the number of people sent to prison and the length of time they spend there.

But criminal justice experts now agree that today's levels of incarceration are not making us safer.[19] In 2014, the National Academies of Sciences summarized the research on the causes and consequences of mass incarceration and found that "long prison sentences are ineffective as a crime control measure."[20] Changes to justice policy are starting to emerge. The state prison population has declined slightly in recent years. Many states took steps toward revising their sentencing or corrections laws in 2014 and 2015, and voters have even gone to the ballot to reverse some of the harshest policies adopted in the 1980s and '90s.[21]

LINDSEY, TEXAS

It took days before my family and I found out that my sister was killed by her husband. At first, we thought she died in a car accident. It took even longer — throughout the trial — to get the full picture of what happened that day.

We now know that my sister and her husband were arguing. In the heat of the moment, he shot and killed her.

My family received no information, support, or a sense of collaboration with officials handling my sister's case. In the immediate aftermath of her death, we had to struggle just to get custody of my nephew. We didn't know who to go to for information or how to get help. To this day, no one in my family, except my nephew, has received counseling. But the trauma has affected us all.

Victims and families need help recovering from crime. I've also come to realize that focusing too much on punishment can cause us to lose sight of the big picture. Initially, I was very angry at my brother-in-law and wanted retribution. But with time, I began to think about how the system had failed us all. My brother-in-law had substance abuse addiction issues and had been incarcerated. Did his drug addiction and experience in prison play a role in his loss of control? He's not a bad person.

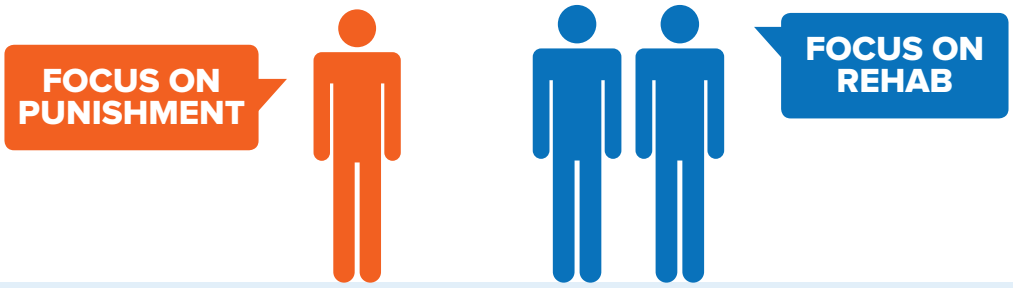
Public safety must be the top priority. But I believe we can best achieve that by helping those with substance abuse and mental health problems. Our criminal justice system should do more to help rehabilitate people like my brother-in-law instead of making them worse off and more likely to commit crimes.

VICTIMS PREFER A JUSTICE SYSTEM THAT FOCUSES MORE ON REHABILITATION THAN PUNISHMENT

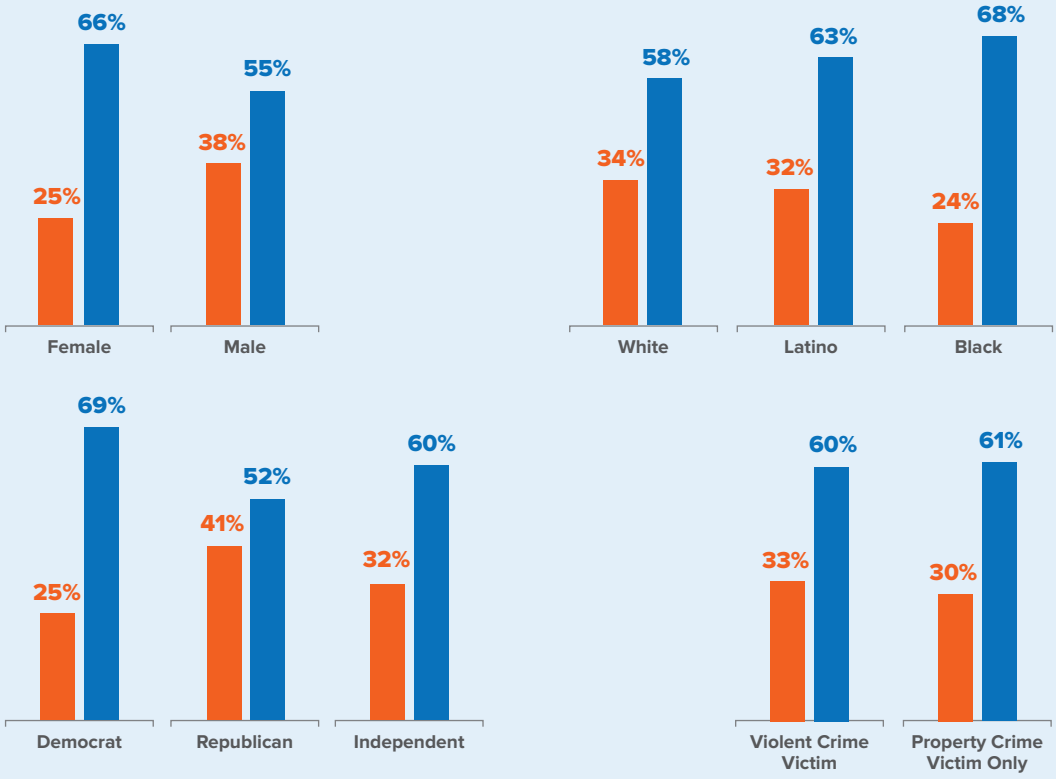
By a **2 to 1** margin, victims prefer that the criminal justice system focus more on rehabilitating people who commit crimes than punishing them.

For every victim who prefers the criminal justice system focus on punishment...

...there are two victims who prefer it focus on rehabilitation.

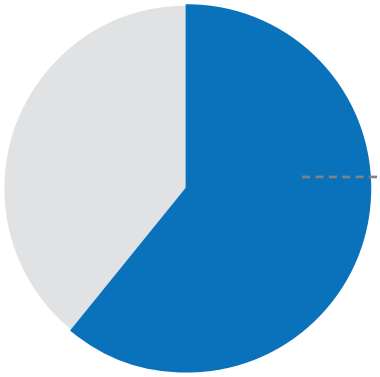


DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD BE MORE FOCUSED ON...



VICTIMS PREFER SHORTER PRISON SENTENCES AND MORE SPENDING ON PREVENTION TO LONGER PRISON SENTENCES

Six in 10 victims prefer shorter prison sentences and more spending on prevention and rehabilitation to prison sentences that keep people in prison for as long as possible.

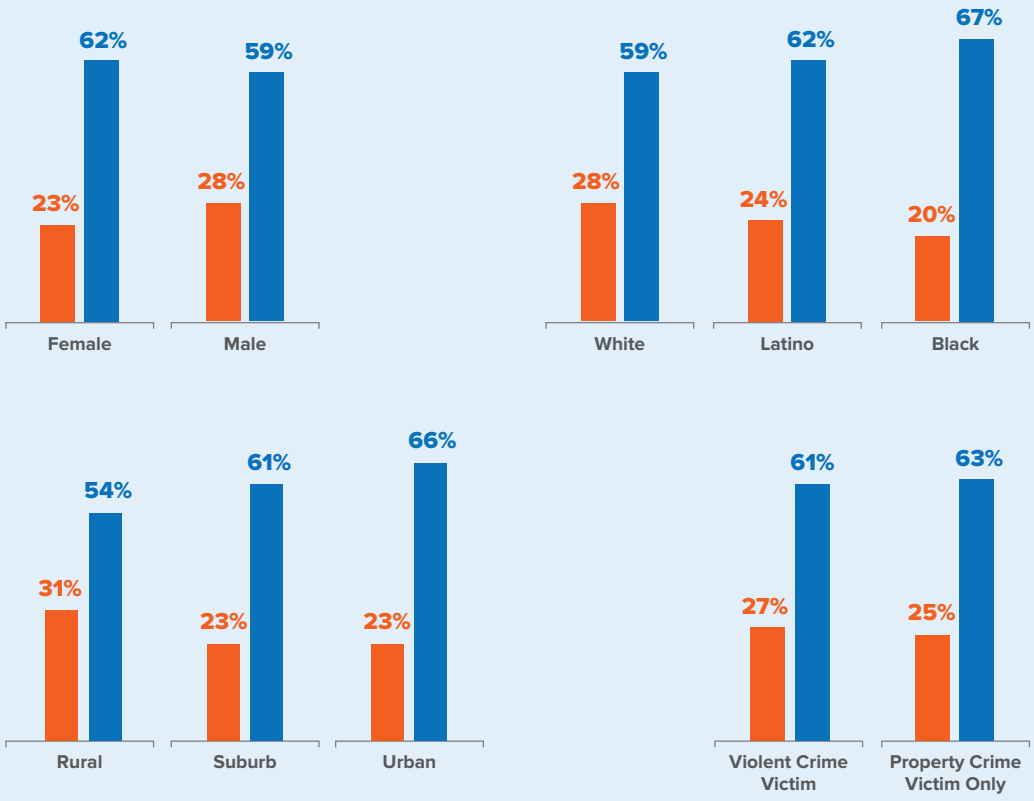


61%

- SHORTER SENTENCES
- SPENDING ON PREVENTION

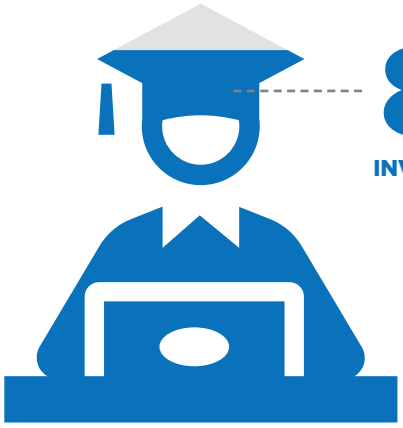
WHICH DO YOU PREFER...

- Prison sentences that keep people in prison for as long as possible
- Shorter prison sentences and spending more on prevention and rehabilitation programs



VICTIMS PREFER INVESTMENTS IN SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION TO PRISONS AND JAILS

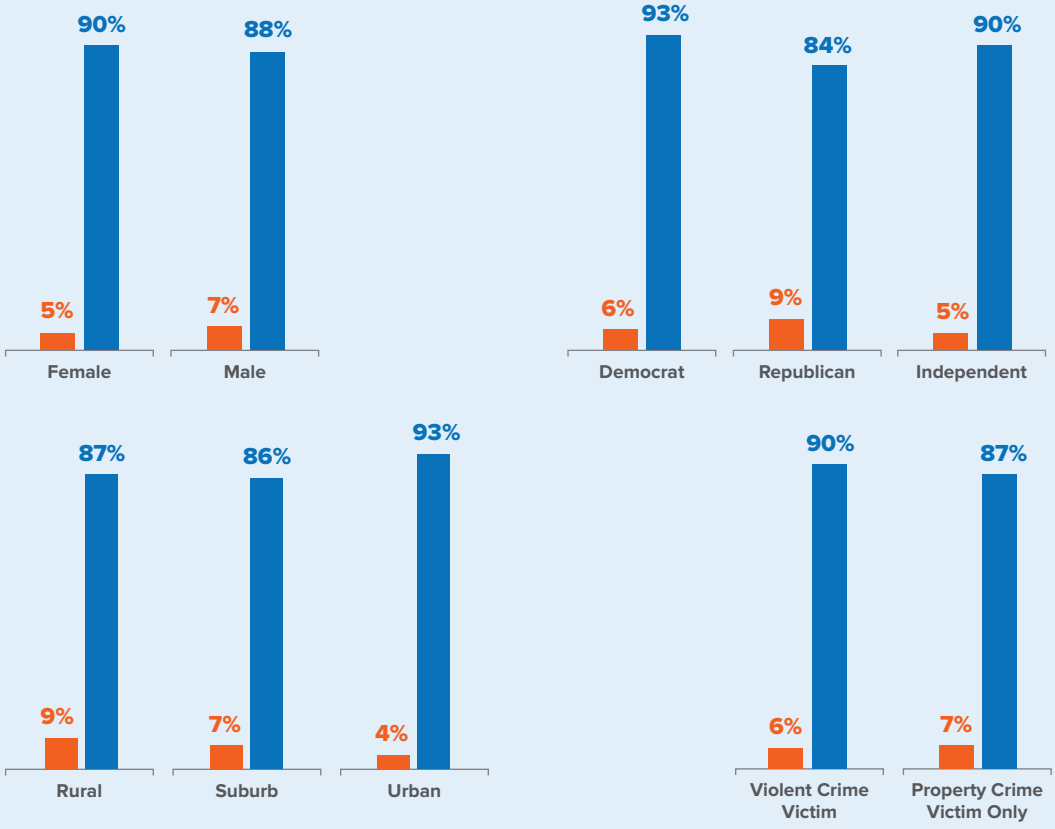
By a margin of **15 to 1**, victims prefer more investment in schools and education to more investments in prisons and jails.



89%
INVEST IN EDUCATION

6%
INVEST IN PRISONS

DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD...



VICTIMS PREFER INCREASED INVESTMENTS IN JOB CREATION AND CRIME PREVENTION TO PRISONS AND JAILS

By a margin of **10 to 1,** victims prefer more investment in job creation to more investment in prisons and jails.

JOB CREATION

PRISONS AND JAILS

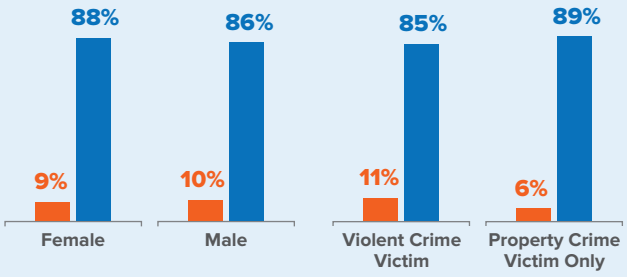
By a margin of **7 to 1,** victims prefer more investment in crime prevention and programs for at-risk youth to more investment in prisons and jails.

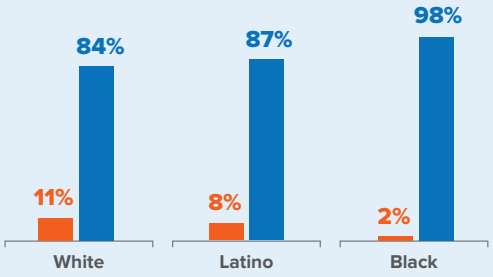
CRIME PREVENTION

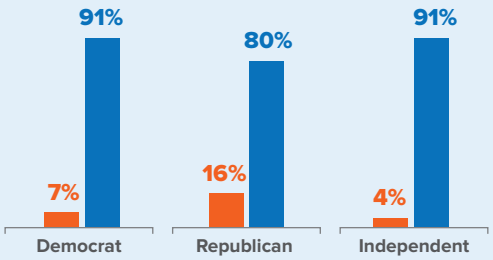
PRISONS AND JAILS

DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD...

- Invest more in prisons and jails
- Invest more in creating jobs

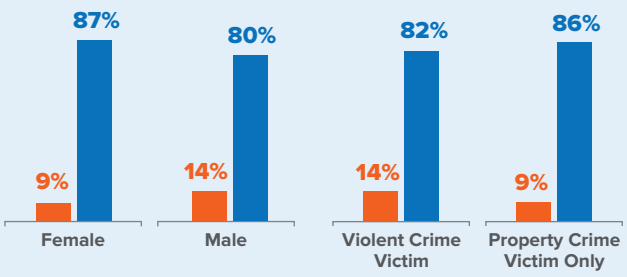


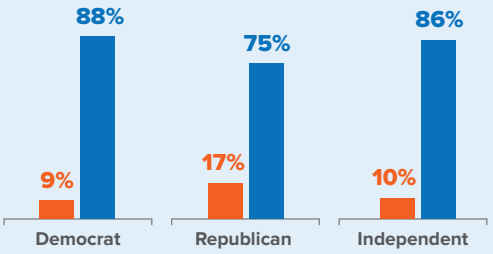


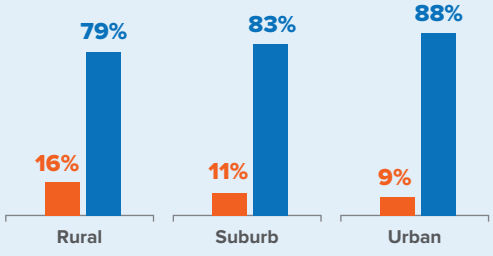


DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD...

- Invest more in prisons and jails
- Invest more in programs for at-risk youth and other crime prevention programs







VICTIMS PREFER INCREASED INVESTMENTS IN TREATMENT TO PRISONS AND JAILS

By a margin of **7 to 1**, victims prefer more investment in mental health treatment to more investment in prisons and jails.

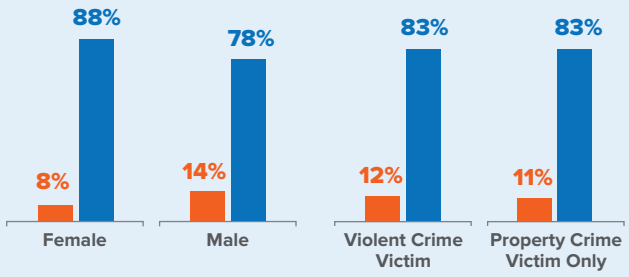
83%
INVEST MORE IN MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

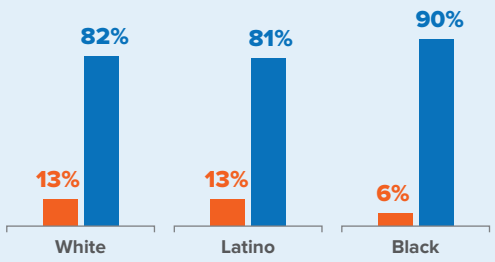
By a margin of nearly **4 to 1,** victims prefer more investment in drug treatment to more investment in prisons and jails.

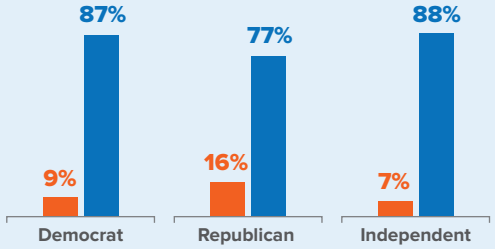
73%
INVEST MORE IN DRUG TREATMENT

DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD...

- Invest more in prisons and jails
- Invest more in mental health treatment

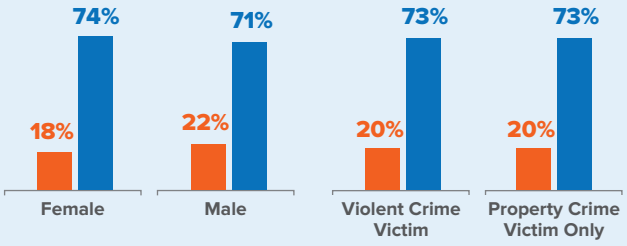


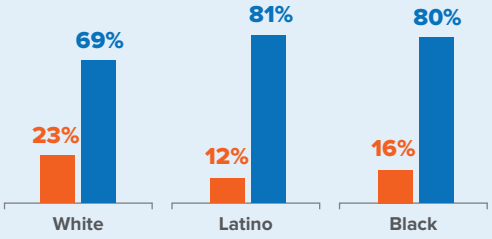


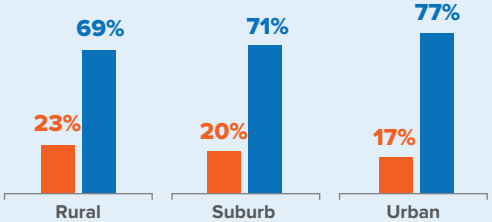


DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD...

- Invest more in prisons and jails
- Invest more in drug treatment



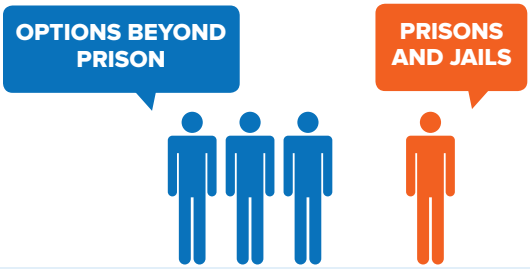




VICTIMS PREFER ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION AND OPTIONS BEYOND PRISON TO HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE

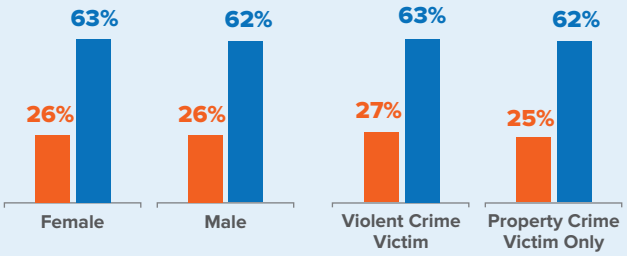
By a margin of **2 to 1,** victims prefer more investment in community supervision, such as probation and parole, to more investment in prisons and jails.

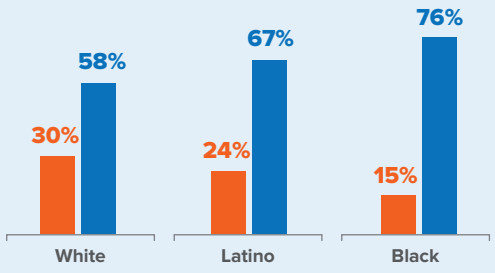
By a margin of **3 to 1**, victims prefer holding people accountable through options beyond just prison, such as rehabilitation, mental health treatment, drug treatment, community supervision, or community service.

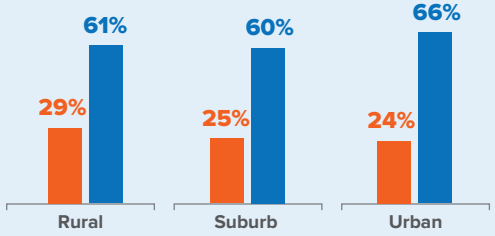


DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD...

- Invest more in prisons and jails
- Invest more in community supervision such as probation and parole

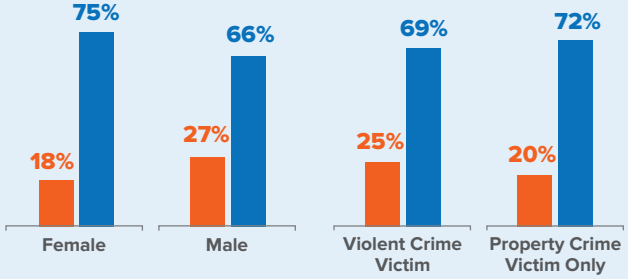


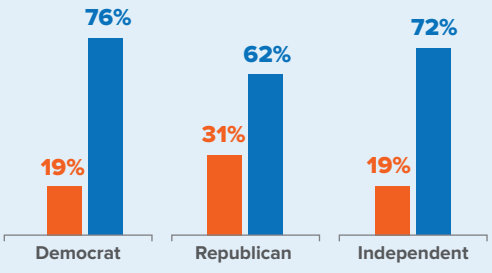


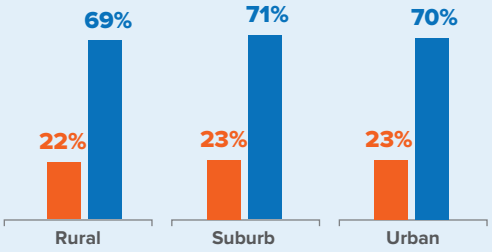


WHICH DO YOU PREFER...

- Holding people who commit crimes accountable by putting them in prison
- Holding people who commit crimes accountable through different options beyond just prison





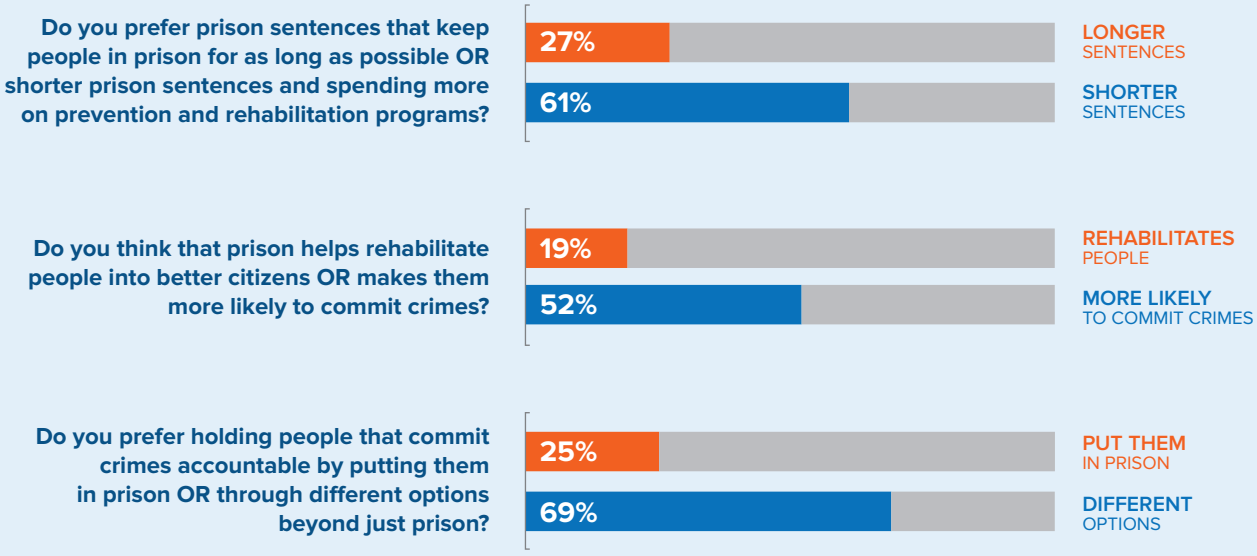


Victims of Violent Crime Share the Views of Crime Victims Overall

The vast majority of crime survivors believe we rely too heavily on incarceration and want policymakers to invest in new safety priorities that better protect victims and help them recover from the crimes committed against them. Victims of property and violent crime alike share these views, and the nature of the crime incident matters less than one might expect.

Survivors of violent crime — including victims of the most serious crimes such as rape or murder of a family member — widely support reducing incarceration to invest in prevention and rehabilitation and strongly believe that prison does more harm than good.

VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME WIDELY SUPPORT REDUCING INCARCERATION TO INVEST IN PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION



MOTHERS OF MURDER VICTIMS ORGANIZING FOR NEW SAFETY PRIORITIES

DORIS, ILLINOIS

Three days after my son was killed, I publicly forgave the perpetrator. I didn't know who did it, but I knew many of my son's friends would be at the vigil where I declared my forgiveness, young people who were angry and in pain. I did not want to provoke vengeance or retribution. More violence would not bring my beloved son back. I also thought about the mother of the person who killed my son. She was suffering, too; her child took someone's life. I didn't want to add to that pain.

There isn't a lot of support for mothers who've lost their kids to violence. So, in 2013, I decided to form an organization to meet that need. Padres Angeles (Parents of Angels) conducts street outreach, supports parents who've lost their children, and holds workshops to strengthen family communication and relationships. We also organize vigils and marches to respond to community violence. By helping other families, I found healing for myself.

I believe that violence is a complex issue that requires a varied and coordinated response — much like treating a cancer patient with surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. The current criminal justice system's one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work for low-income communities of color. Instead of jails and prisons, we need more emphasis on rehabilitation to help people turn their lives around.

DOROTHY, PENNSYLVANIA

On December 6, 2001, at 2 a.m., I got a call. My 24-year-old son, Khaaliq, was in the hospital — shot seven times by a neighbor over an argument about a parking spot. By the time I arrived at the hospital, he was already gone.

After Khaaliq died, I didn't want to live. I was overwhelmed by the pain, despair and anger. Eventually, I received counseling to deal with my grief. Two years after Khaaliq's death, I formed Mothers in Charge as another vehicle to channel my pain and find healing. It is a lifeline for me and for others who have lost loved ones.

What started as two dozen women meeting in our homes has turned into a national support network of more than 1,000 in cities in Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, New Jersey, Missouri, and California. Today, we have expanded our work to advocate for safe communities and prevent violence, and we go into jails and prisons to work with children and women, many of whom are survivors themselves.

We know hurt people hurt people. To truly stem violent behavior, we have to address the root problems facing people who commit crimes so they can come back into our communities ready to make positive contributions. We need to revamp the current criminal justice system to provide treatment, education and other alternatives.

JUDY, OHIO

My son, Chris, was sitting with his friend in the parking lot of a gym when he was shot and killed. He was only 24 years old. It was all for some car rims.

Three years after Chris's murder, I formed Survivors/ Victims of Tragedy. I needed to be around a group of people who intimately understood my struggles. We regularly share meals together and hold meetings. We organize memorial remembrances, vigils, and rallies for those who have lost a loved one to violence. Members of our group have also spoken at schools and prisons about their experiences, which I believe has helped people steer away from violence themselves.

On the 13th anniversary of Chris's death, I went to prison to visit the man who murdered my son. He told me that he wished he listened to the inner voice that told him not to do it that day. He was recently denied parole, but I do believe he should have a chance to come out, be with his child and change his life.

The way our criminal justice system is set up currently doesn't allow for redemption. People in prison should have access to education, anger management and other programs so they have a real chance to heal themselves and contribute to society when they're released. We must treat each other, even those among us who have made serious mistakes, with more humanity. It's the only way forward.

WHAT ARE VICTIMS' VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF PROSECUTORS?

In addition to supporting rehabilitation over punishment, shorter sentences and more spending on prevention, and alternative options beyond prison, victims also support prosecution approaches that emphasize stopping the cycle of crime over a focus on tough sentences.

victims prefer that prosecutors focus on solving neighborhood problems and stopping repeat crimes through rehabilitation, even if it means fewer convictions and prison sentences

Victims prefer prosecutors focus on solving neighborhood problems

Seven in 10 victims prefer that prosecutors focus on solving neighborhood problems and stopping repeat crimes through rehabilitation, even if it means fewer convictions and prison sentences.

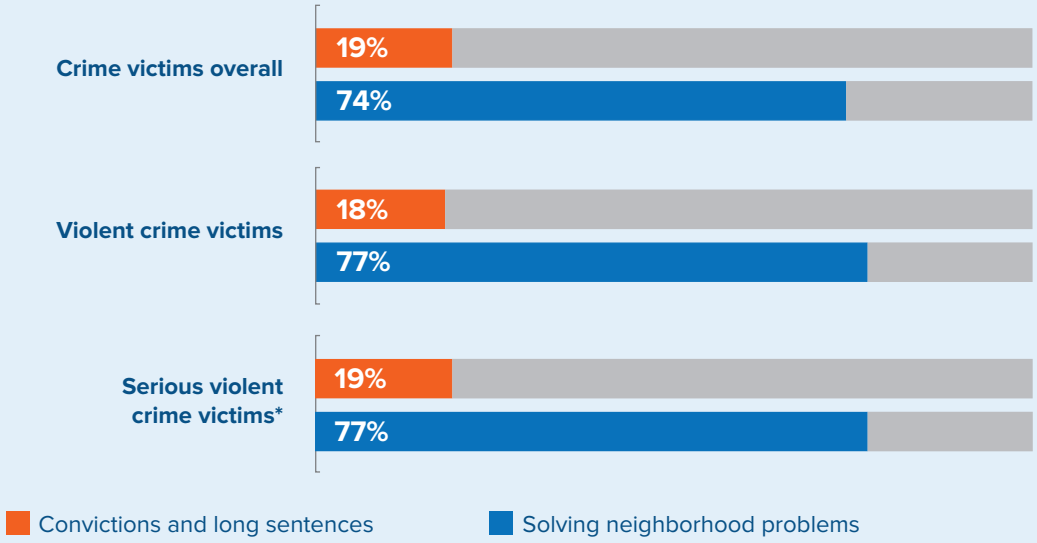
Victims prefer prosecutors consider victims' opinions even when victims do not support long prison sentences

Six in 10 victims prefer that prosecutors consider victims' opinions on what would help them recover from the crime, even when victims do not want long prison sentences.

For each of the findings on the role of prosecutors, victims of violent crime demonstrate equal or stronger support for reform than crime victims overall. These are especially noteworthy findings given the experiences of violent crime victims, who often have more contact with law enforcement and prosecutors' offices than those who have been victims of property crime.

WHICH SHOULD BE PROSECUTORS' PRIMARY GOAL?

Getting as many convictions and prison sentences as possible OR solving neighborhood problems and stopping repeat crimes through rehabilitation, even if it means fewer convictions?



* Serious violent crimes include rape, assault, sexual assault, or murder of a family member

HOW DO WE MEASURE AND DEFINE VIOLENT CRIME

To better understand the ways in which people are most commonly victimized, the survey asked interviewees whether they had been the victim of rape, assault, sexual assault, stalking, robbery, burglary, theft, vandalism, identity theft, or the murder of a family member.

These crimes represent the vast majority of crimes reported to law enforcement and collected by the FBI for the UCR.[22] Crimes defined as violent for the purposes of this survey include rape, assault, sexual assault, stalking, robbery, and the murder of a family member.

PERCENT OF CRIME SURVIVORS VICTIMIZED BY OFFENSE

VIOLENT CRIMES	
Robbery	25%
Assault	25%
Rape	9%
Sexual assault	11%
Stalking	29%
Murder of a family member	12%
At least one violent crime	**52%**

PROPERTY CRIMES	
Theft	79%
Burglary	38%
Vandalism	50%
Identity theft	53%
At least one property crime	**93%**

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

NEW SAFETY PRIORITIES TO SUPPORT CRIME SURVIVORS AND STOP THE CYCLE OF CRIME

The National Survey of Victims' Views is an important step forward in understanding who victims are and what they need to recover from the crimes committed against them.

These results paint a different picture than some common assumptions about victims, their views and what they want from the criminal justice system.

One in four people have been a victim of crime in the past 10 years. While crime impacts people from all walks of life, the impact of crime is not evenly felt across demographic groups. Young, low-income people of color are more likely to experience victimization. Victims of violent crime are nearly always also victims of property crime and experience much higher rates of repeat victimization.

Crime is a traumatic experience for most crime victims, yet few are supported by the criminal justice system. Two out of three victims received no help following the incident and those who did were far more likely to receive it from family and friends than law enforcement or prosecutor offices.

Victims believe we send too many people to prison, for too long, and that our current incarceration policies make people more — not less — likely to commit another crime. Instead of more spending on prisons and jails, victims prefer a wide range of investments and new safety priorities including more spending on education, job creation programs, and mental health treatment. Importantly, victims support reducing sentence lengths to pay for these investments.

These beliefs cut across demographic groups, with a majority of Republicans and Democrats supporting reform regardless of how the question is asked. Perhaps to the surprise of some, victims of violent crime also share these views and demonstrate strong support for shifting the focus of the criminal justice system from punishment to rehabilitation.

Collectively, these findings point to several policy recommendations:

1

CONDUCT ANNUAL VICTIMIZATION STUDIES AT THE STATE LEVEL.

Use this information to inform justice policy and develop solutions to crime that are responsive to victims' experiences and reflect their safety priorities. More research and data are critical to identify the policies and practices that best protect victims, stop the cycle of crime and help victims recover. States should invest in collecting more information on who crime victims are and their experiences with the justice system, crime reporting, the impact of repeat victimization and trauma, and access to services and treatment for victims.

2

TARGET VICTIM SERVICES FUNDING FOR THE COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE BEEN MOST HARMED BY REPEAT CRIME AND LEAST SUPPORTED BY THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.

Last year, the U.S. Congress increased the funding cap of the 1984 Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) from $745 million to $2.3 billion.[23] The funding increase of over 200% provides an unprecedented opportunity for states to provide services to vulnerable victims and communities experiencing concentrated crime and violence.[24]

3

INVEST IN EVIDENCE-BASED SERVICES THAT PROTECT CRIME SURVIVORS AND STOP THE CYCLE OF VICTIMIZATION, SUCH AS THOSE PROVIDED BY TRAUMA RECOVERY CENTERS.

One of the key elements to improving public safety and community health is helping victims recover from the long-lasting impacts of crime. A growing body of research demonstrates that untreated trauma, especially among those who experience repeat victimization, can contribute to substance abuse, mental health issues, housing instability, or other problems that increase the risk of being a victim again in the future or even engaging in crime.[25] Model programs to help survivors access trauma recovery support are developing across the country and should be brought to scale.

4

SUPPORT INNOVATIONS IN PROSECUTION.

Despite strong support among crime survivors for prosecution approaches that focus on neighborhood problem solving, rehabilitation and alternatives to incarceration, too few prosecutor offices focus on these strategies or have support to innovate and end the practice of over-incarceration. Prosecutor offices should expand new problem-solving approaches to stop the cycle of crime, and states should expand support for innovations in prosecution and elevate best practices and models to be replicated and brought to scale.

5

ADVANCE SENTENCING AND CORRECTIONS POLICIES THAT MORE CLOSELY ALIGN WITH SURVIVORS' PRIORITIES.

The "tough on crime era" was bolstered by a perception that mandatory sentencing and tough incarceration policies were both popular with the public and supported by crime victims. Across the country, prisons budgets have exploded and incarceration rates have skyrocketed. Now is the time for bold new approaches to sentencing and investments in new safety priorities. A diverse group of states from California to Georgia to Maryland have advanced sentencing reforms that have started to reduce incarceration rates and expand options beyond prison, including rehabilitation, restorative justice, community supervision, mental health and drug treatment and more. Victims support these types of reform. This report points to a strong new vision for safety. States should take action to rethink tough mandatory sentencing, reduce over-incarceration, and reallocate from costly prisons to crime prevention, education, job creation, treatment and alternatives, community health, and trauma recovery. Crime survivors across demographic groups widely support these approaches to stop the cycle of crime and protect future generations from falling through the cracks.

MICHELLE, CALIFORNIA

In my early 20s, someone I knew and trusted sexually assaulted me. To make matters worse, afterward, I was blamed and shamed on social media. The trauma was so overwhelming that I thought I would end up hospitalized. I had panic attacks, had trouble focusing and concentrating and didn't go out in public. I ended up quitting college and losing my job.

I didn't know how to ask for support, what I even needed, and who I could trust. I felt like I had to support myself. So, I sought out classes on sexual violence and trauma, and found others who went through similar experiences. I found teachers who understood my situation and could help explain what I felt. And I found validation from others who suffered from PTSD and panic attacks.

But I needed more — I needed comfort. I didn't want to go anywhere, and, yet, I had to go search for help in all these different places. I wanted somewhere centralized where I could get the support I needed all in one place and also have an advocate who could help me work through the process. My mom, who works for the city, told me about Trauma Recovery Center in San Francisco, which provides wrap-around care to adult survivors of trauma and violence. They provided me with regular therapy, referred me to a peer support group and helped with transportation costs. I not only found support for myself, but I also got involved in educating others about sexual violence and sexual health. It was life changing. My involvement in this community and hearing others' stories of hope and healing helped with my own trauma.

So many victims suffer in silence, and it impacts everything from our health to our ability to hold jobs — trauma is like suffocating. If we can invest in trauma recovery, we can stop the cycle. I will always be in the process of healing, but I'm thankful to be where I am today. I'm optimistic that more people will grow aware of trauma and mental health issues, and that there will be more places to turn for women who go through similarly traumatic experiences.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Alliance for Safety and Justice commissioned the National Survey of Victims' Views to fill in gaps in knowledge about who crime victims are, what their experiences are with the criminal justice system, and their views on public policy.

Some of the questions were informed by the largest and most comprehensive source of data on victimization — the annual National Crime Victimization Survey, administered by the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics. This survey expands on questions related to the prevalence of victimization by deeply exploring victims' experience with the criminal justice system, their views on sentencing and corrections policy, and their preferences related to law enforcement, prosecution, and incarceration.

David Binder Research conducted the survey in English and Spanish in April 2016. The poll was administered both by telephone — landlines and mobile phones — and online. This research methodology was designed to ensure the inclusion of harder-to-reach demographic groups, such as young people and people with less housing stability.

Furthermore, David Binder Research oversampled people who identify as black or Latino to ensure that their voices would be adequately represented in the survey. As a result, these findings reflect the opinions of a broad and diverse America: All ages 18+, all racial and ethnic groups, and all geographic locations are represented.

A common challenge in victimization research is the reluctance of people to discuss their victimization with a researcher. For reasons relating to the social stigma of being a crime victim and associated data collection challenges, it can be difficult to identify sufficient respondents in victimization research. For this reason, the National Survey of Victims' Views used a 10-year reference period. However, just as many crimes are not reported to the police, some crime is not reported to researchers. Like NCVS and other victim surveys, the National Survey of Victims Views likely does not capture the total number of crimes experienced by those surveyed. While David Binder Research informed people that their personal information is kept confidential and used for research purposes only, we anticipate that respondents may have under-reported their victimization in this survey.

The overall margin of error for the National Survey of Victims' Views is 1.7 percent, while the margin of error for crime victims is 3.5 percent.

ENDNOTES

[1] The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) have recognized the need for additional data related to victimization and victim assistance. Under the leadership of BJS and OVC, the Department of Justice is currently engaged in a multi-year effort to fill long-standing gaps in information. This includes a redesign of the NCVS to expand the information collected about formal and informal help-seeking behavior, issues related to fear of crime, and perceptions of neighborhood disorder and police performance; the development of subnational estimates of victimization at the state and local level, and the first-ever national survey of victim service providers.

[2] David Binder Research is a public opinion research firm with more than 20 years of experience in all types of research, from focus groups to surveys to online research, on behalf of clients ranging from businesses to government agencies to nonprofit organizations.

[3] Truman, Jennifer L., Ph.D.; Langton, Lynn. "Criminal Victimization, 2014," Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, August 2015 (National Crime Victimization Survey).

[4] Ibid.

[5] Weisel, Deborah Lamm. "Analyzing Repeat Victimization," Center for Problem Oriented Policing, 2005.

[6] Includes Black or African American; Latino, Hispanic, or Mexican American; Asian or Pacific Islander; Native American; and mixed race.

[7] Truman and Langton, 2015.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Kearney, Melissa S.; Harris, Benjamin H.; Jácome, Elisa; Parker, Lucie. "Ten Economic Facts about Crime and Incarceration in the United States," The Hamilton Project, May 2014.

[11] Kilpatrick, Dean G.; Acierno, Ron. "Mental Health Needs of Crime Victims: Epidemiology and Outcomes." Journal of Traumatic Stress, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2003.

[12] Californians for Safety and Justice. "California Crime Victims' Voices: Findings from the First-Ever Survey of California Crime Victims and Survivors," June 2013.

[13] Truman and Langton, 2015.

[14] The Council of State Governments Justice Center. "Reducing Recidivism and Improving Other Outcomes for Young Adults in the Juvenile and Adult Criminal Justice Systems," November 2015.

[15] Californians for Safety and Justice. "Victims of Crime Act and the Need for Advocacy," April 2016.

[16] Due to a small sample size, data on the views and beliefs of Asian Americans are not reported in demographic breakdowns. Alliance for Safety and Justice is engaged in other methods of research to better understand the needs of Asian American victims.

[17] Importantly, none of these questions distinguished between crime types (i.e., violent or nonviolent), indicating that victims are open to reconsidering long sentences for a wide range of crimes.

[18] Kearney et al.

[19] Roeder, Oliver; Eisen, Lauren-Brooke; Bowling, Julia. "What Caused the Crime Decline," Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, February 2015.

[20] National Research Council. The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences," Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration, J. Travis, B. Western, and S. Redburn, Committee on Law and Justice, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, April 2014.

[21] Silber, Rebecca; Subramanian, Ram; Spotts, Maia. "Justice in Review: New Trends in State Sentencing and Corrections 2014–2015," Vera Institute of Justice, May 2016.

[22] We asked specifically about six of the eight "Part I" crimes reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as part of its Uniform Crime Reports. Instead of asking about motor vehicle thefts and arson, respondents were asked about their experience with sexual assault, stalking, vandalism, and identity theft.

[23] Californians for Safety and Justice. "Victims of Crime Act and the Need for Advocacy," April 2016.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Warnken, Heather. "Untold Stories of California Crime Victims: Research and Recommendations on Repeat Victimization and Rebuilding Lives," Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy, University of California, Berkeley School of Law, April 2014.

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