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New Study Finds Majority of Crime Victims Support Shorter Prison Sentences, Smarter Safety Investments

First-of-its-kind national survey paints surprising picture of victims' views on criminal justice priorities

A new, first-of-its-kind national [survey](#) released by the [Alliance for Safety and Justice](#) (ASJ) bucks conventional wisdom regarding the views of crime victims on incarceration. Despite popular assumptions that victims support long sentences and prison expansion, the National Survey of Victims' Views finds that victims would prefer the criminal justice system focus more on rehabilitation than punishment by a **2 to 1 margin**.

In fact, 61 percent of crime victims support shorter prison sentences and more spending on prevention and rehabilitation to long prison sentences. The vast majority of victims also prefer investments in education, mental health treatment, drug treatment, and job training to more spending on prisons and jails.

By a margin of nearly 3 to 1, crime victims believe that time in prison makes people more likely to commit another crime rather than less likely. **These views cut across demographic groups, with wide support across race, age, gender, and political party affiliation.**

"For too long when we talk about safety it's been a conversation about building prisons and increasing incarceration. What we know is that hasn't worked to help the communities most impacted by crime and violence," said Lenore Anderson, President, Alliance for Safety and Justice. "What we're hearing from crime survivors is that we need to invest in new safety priorities that stop the cycle of crime, such as programs for at-risk youth, mental health treatment, drug treatment, and rehabilitation."

Perhaps to the surprise of some, support for reform and a new approach to safety and justice policy is strong even among victims of violent crimes. The [survey](#), which interviewed 800 crime survivors across the country, included both victims of non-violent crime and victims of violent crime including the most serious crimes of rape or murder of a family member.

"More than 2.2 million people are in prisons and jails across the country and the U.S. spends more than 80 billion dollars each year locking people up," said Robert Rooks, Vice President, Alliance for Safety and Justice. "Yet the findings show that America's investments in our current criminal justice system do not align with the views of crime victims or meet their needs."

The survey finds that victims of crime experience significant challenges in recovery and healing—8 in 10 report experiencing at least one symptom of trauma. The survey found 2 out of 3 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.

One in four people have been victimized in the past 10 years, but that impact is not evenly felt across the country. The study finds victims of crime are more likely to be low-income, young and people of color; furthermore, people with the lowest levels of education, income and economic status are more likely to experience repeat victimization and serious violent crime.

Instead of more spending on incarceration, victims want a wide range of investments in new safety priorities:

- 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 to more investments in prisons and jails
- By a margin of **10 to 1**, victims prefer increased investments in job creation to more investments in prisons and jails
- By a margin of **7 to 1**, victims prefer increased investments in mental health treatment to more investments in prisons and jails
- By a margin of **7 to 1** victims prefer increased investments in crime prevention and programs for at-risk youth to more investments in prisons and jails
- By a margin of **4 to 1** victims prefer increased investments in drug treatment to 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 to more investments in prisons and jails

Survivors Speak

Aswad, CA

Aswad was finishing college and was offered a contract to play pro-basketball in Europe when he was shot by two men who tried to rob him.

“At times I 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.”

Lindsey, TX

It took days before Lindsey’s family found out that her sister was killed by her husband. Her brother-in-law had substance abuse addiction issues and had been incarcerated.

“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.”

The full report, victims’ profiles and a video featuring crime survivors are featured at www.allianceforsafetyandjustice.org.

Alliance for Safety and Justice is a national organization that aims to win new safety priorities in states across the country. We partner with state leaders, advocates and crime survivors to advance policies to replace prison waste with new safety priorities that will help the communities most harmed by crime and violence. For more information visit <https://www.allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/> or follow us on twitter [@SafeandJustUSA](https://twitter.com/SafeandJustUSA)

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