

2024

CRIME SURVIVORS SPEAK

A NATIONAL SURVEY OF VICTIMS' VIEWS ON

SAFETY AND JUSTICE





Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) is a multi-state organization that works to advance public safety reform in states across the country through coalition building, research, education, advocacy, and grassroots organizing. Our Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice membership program represents more than 200,000 diverse survivors of crime from across the country.



Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice (CSSJ) is a national network of more than 200,000 crime victims advocating for a justice system that prioritizes healing, prevention, and recovery. The organization represents a new victims' rights movement that centers the voices and needs of crime survivors in decisions about public safety. The movement's grassroots, member-led initiatives have successfully driven significant policy changes and opened groundbreaking trauma recovery centers across the country. CSSJ is a flagship project of the Alliance for Safety and Justice. For more information, visit <https://cssj.org/>.

INTRODUCTION

Despite billions spent on public safety in the United States, there is a gap between the safety investments victims of violence prefer and what government leaders prioritize. Crime Survivors Speak 2024 is the largest commissioned survey of violent crime victims in the nation. The results expose that gap and offer a safer path forward. Aligning public policy with the needs and preferences of violent crime victims would cause a breakthrough in American crime policy and bring safety and healing to millions. It's a breakthrough that's long overdue.

One in three Americans has been a victim of violent crime in the past ten years. The majority of victims of violence receive no support in the aftermath of harm. Many suffer wide-ranging negative impacts including post-traumatic stress disorder, disability and chronic illness, bankruptcy, and depression and anxiety. Failing to help victims recover causes cascading consequences for individuals, families, communities, and public safety.

Policymakers have historically responded to increased concerns about crime and victimization with rhetoric that emphasized getting "tough on crime" and policies that expanded the justice system. However, across

the country, diverse victims of crime have long been advocating for a different approach. Most victims strongly prefer safety solutions focused on what is needed to stop cycles of harm: healing and a new approach to public safety.

Since 2014, Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice has conducted outreach, surveyed, interviewed, and convened over 15,000 crime victims and hundreds of local victim-serving organizations across the country.

This report is the latest in a series of publications that survey victims of crime and present their policy preferences, budgetary priorities, and goals for justice and public safety.

KEY FINDINGS

VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Victims of violent crime reject long sentences as the primary solution to crime.

- By a three-to-one margin, victims believe that the most effective way to reduce crime is to create more jobs and housing instead of long sentences.
- Fewer than one in four victims believes that long sentences are the most effective way to stop people from committing repeat crimes. More than two in three victims believe that mental health and addiction treatment or job training and placement are more effective strategies to stop repeat crimes.

Victims of violent crime prefer investments in communities over more spending on arrests and punishments.

- By a nearly two-to-one margin, victims of violence prefer investment in prevention, crisis assistance, and communities over more spending on arrests and punishment.
- A decisive majority of victims of violence (56% vs 37%) prefer candidates who support shorter prison sentences and who would use the money saved for youth violence and treatment programs over a candidate who supports long sentences.
- When asked which public safety functions were most important to protect from budget cuts during a budget crisis, nearly two-thirds identified mental health and addiction treatment, violence prevention and school-based programs, or emergency shelters and crisis assistance. Fewer than one-third of victims said that law enforcement functions such as police patrols or crime investigations were the most important public safety functions to protect from budget cuts.

Victims of violent crime prefer laws that enable judges and officials to exercise discretion instead of mandatory minimum sentences and “truth in sentencing” laws.

- Seven out of ten victims of violence (71%) prefer sentencing policies that allow judges to consider the individual circumstances of the crime, the victim, and the defendant over sentences that require uniform sentence lengths for specific crimes.
- Three out of five victims of violence (61%) prefer rehabilitation-focused policies that authorize corrections officials to provide earned credits toward release for people in prison with good conduct who complete education, job training, or behavioral therapy programs instead of truth-in-sentencing policies that require everyone to always complete 85% of their court-issued sentence in prison.

Major hardships such as PTSD, bankruptcy, and life-threatening illness often accompany victimization for many victims of violence.

- Compared to people who did not experience violence, people who were victims of violence in the past ten years were 3.8 times as likely to have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder, 3.6 times as likely to have declared bankruptcy, and twice as likely to have survived a life-threatening illness.
- Victims also experience disability, chronic illness, anxiety and depression at significantly higher rates than people who did not experience violence.

WHO ARE

VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE?

One in three Americans (34%) has been a victim of violent crime in the last decade.

Americans of all demographic groups experience violent victimization, but women, people of color, and people in lower-income households experience violence at the highest rates. As is consistent with other surveys, the most common victimization experience is assault, defined as being injured or threatened with a weapon or physical force.

Other victimization experiences are also remarkably common. Eighteen percent of Americans have been a victim of stalking or doxxing in the past ten years, and 14% have been victims of robbery or attempted robbery. One in 14 Americans reported that someone has tried to kill them in the past ten years, and one in 20 Americans has been shot at. Eight percent of respondents reported losing a family member or loved one to homicide in the past ten years.

Black and Latino Americans were significantly more likely to report a violent victimization in the past ten years. Black Americans experienced violent victimization at a rate 31% higher than white Americans, and Latino Americans experienced violence at a rate 25% higher. Forty-two percent of Black respondents were a victim of violence in the past ten years compared to 40% of Latino respondents and 32% of white respondents.

Racial disparities in victimization compound with disparities in income. Sixty percent of Black people

who live in households with less than \$50,000 in income were victims of a violent crime in the past ten years, as were 52% of Latino people in the same household income bracket. Black and Latino people in households with less than \$50,000 in income were 2.4 and 2.1 times more likely to experience violence as white people in households with \$100,000-\$250,000 in income.

1 IN 5

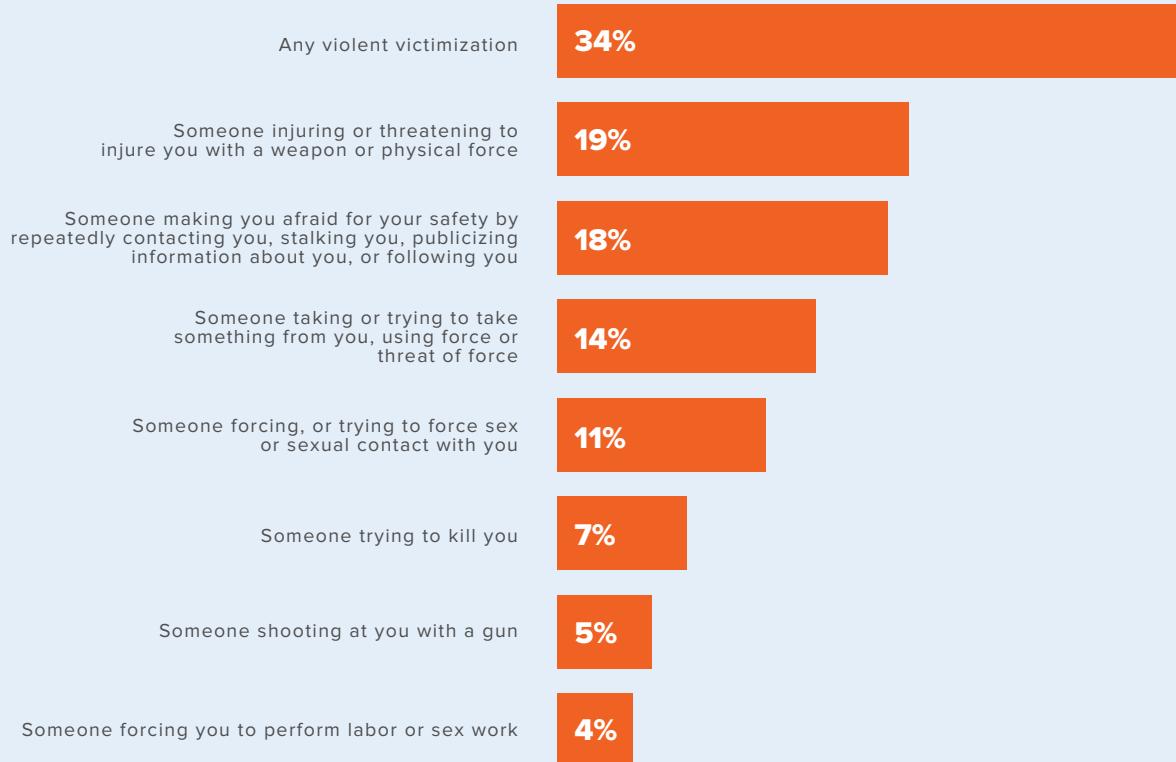
AMERICANS HAVE BEEN INJURED OR THREATENED WITH PHYSICAL FORCE OR A WEAPON IN THE PAST 10 YEARS

People who live in lower-income households are significantly more likely to be victims of violence than people in higher-income households. Half of all respondents who live in households with less than \$25,000 in income were violently victimized in the past ten years.

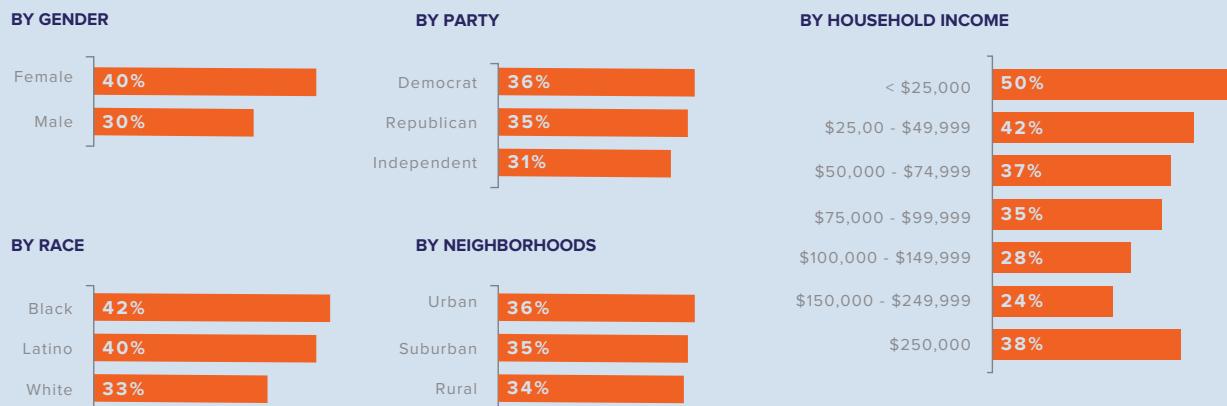
Crime victims are as politically diverse as the country as a whole. Democrats and Republicans experience violence at rates that are statistically equivalent, at 36% and 35%, respectively. Among people who identified as politically independent, 31% were victims of violent crime in the past ten years.



Ten-year victimization rate by type of victimization and by demographic of violent victimization



Ten-year violent victimization rate by demographic categories



MAJOR HARDSHIP OFTEN ACCOMPANIES VICTIMIZATION

Violent victimization often has cascading impacts on survivors' lives. Becoming a victim of violence often causes someone to miss work, go without pay, and endure challenges related to physical and mental health.

Victims of violence experience bankruptcy, disability or chronic illness, life-threatening illness, PTSD, and anxiety or depression at alarming rates. Compared to people who did not experience violence, survivors of violent crimes are 3.8 times as likely to experience PTSD (49% vs 13%), 3.6 times as likely to declare bankruptcy (14% vs 4%), 2.1 times as likely to experience a life-threatening illness, 80% more likely to have a disability or chronic illness (27% vs 15%), and 70% more likely to have experienced anxiety or depression in the past ten years (78% vs 45%).

NEARLY HALF

49%

OF VICTIMS
OF VIOLENT CRIME
SAY THEY
SUFFERED FROM
POST-TRAUMATIC
STRESS DISORDER

The prevalence of major hardship among survivors of violence is a strong indication that our current public safety system is failing. The gap between the support victims of violence need to recover and what they attain leads to increased vulnerability to future victimization and worsened public safety. The collateral impacts on individual life outcomes, families, and communities when victims of violence cannot attain stability should be a wake-up call for policymakers and community leaders alike.

VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE ARE
3.6X AS
LIKELY
TO HAVE
DECLARED
BANKRUPTCY
COMPARED TO PEOPLE WHO
WERE NOT VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE
IN THE LAST TEN YEARS

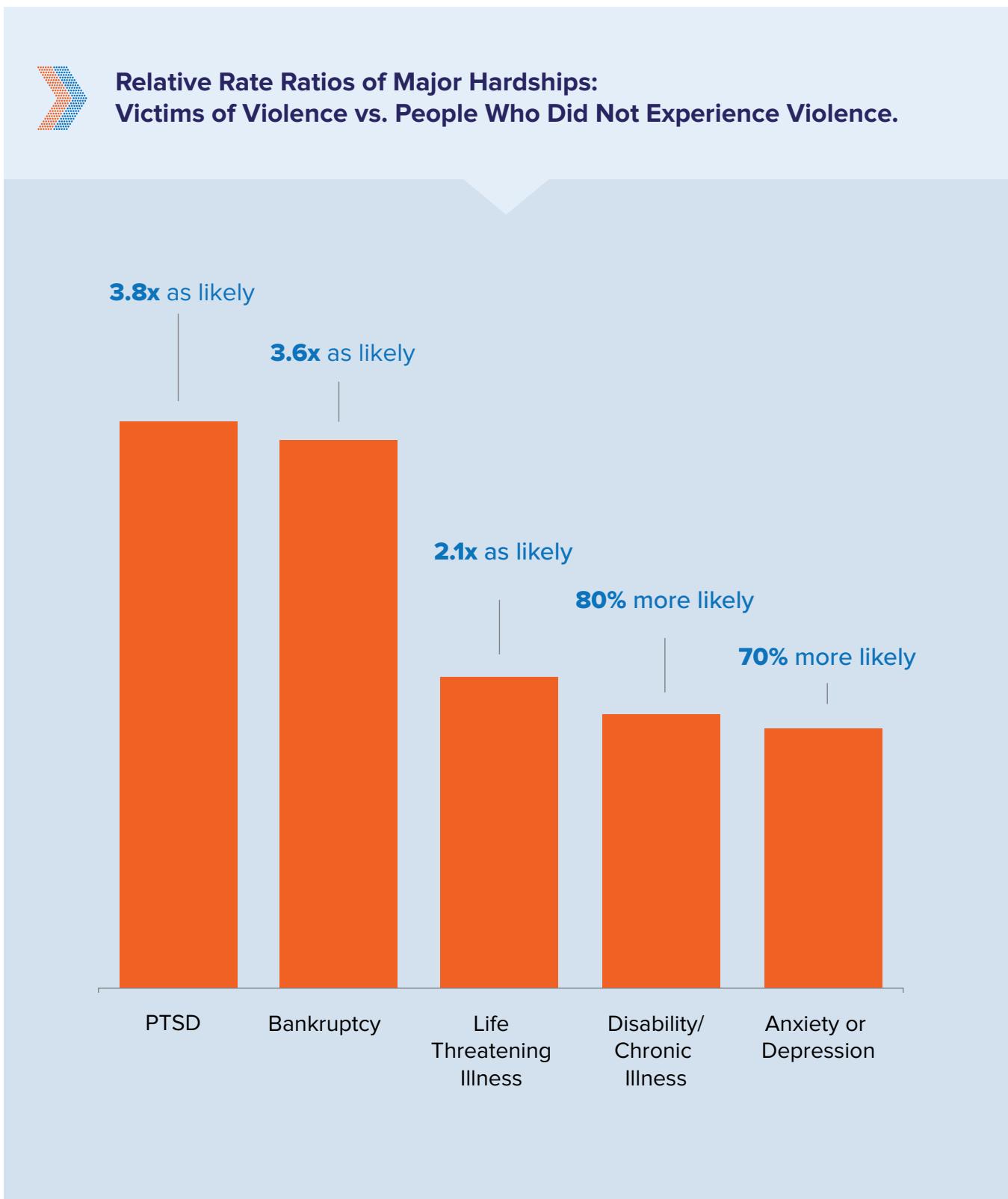
Beyond gaps in help to recover, there is also a gap between what victims of violence believe would improve public safety and current safety policies and investments. The remainder of this report presents the views of victims of violent crime on important issues related to public safety.

MORE THAN

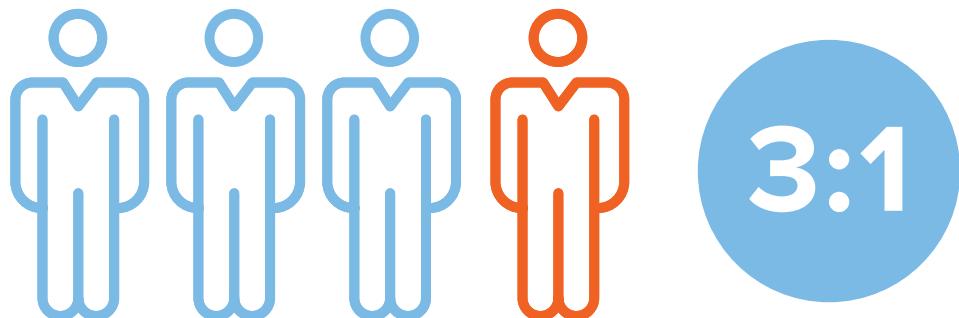
**3 OUT
OF
4**

VICTIMS OF
VIOLENCE
EXPERIENCED
ANXIETY OR
DEPRESSION

Victims of violence are far more likely to experience PTSD, bankruptcy, life-threatening illness, disability or chronic illness, and anxiety or depression.



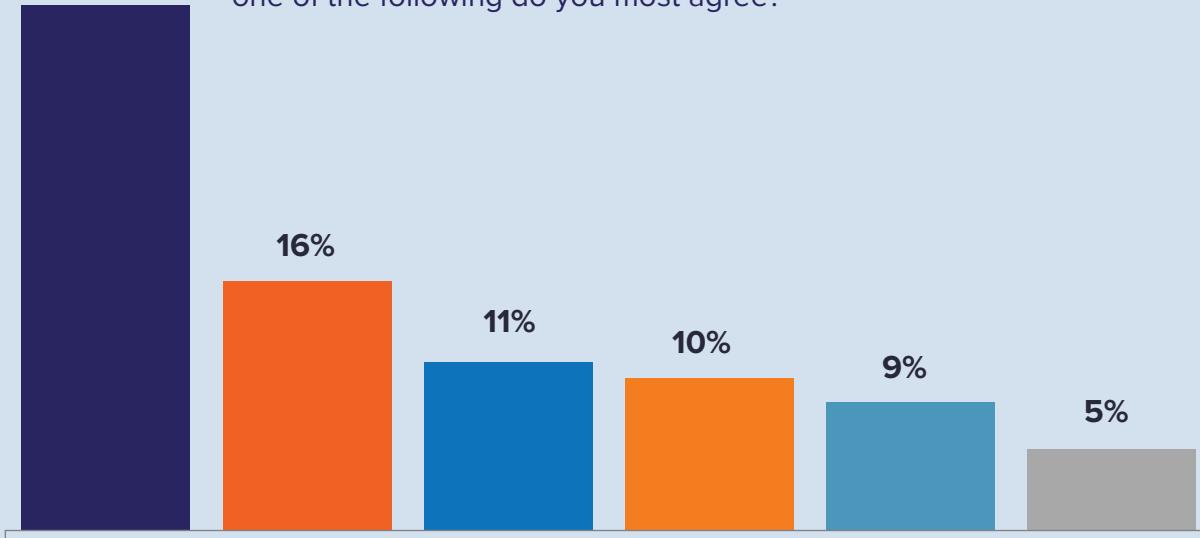
By a margin of 3 to 1, victims think that access to more jobs and housing leads to less crime compared to longer prison sentences.



ONLY 16 PERCENT OF VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME BELIEVE THAT LONGER PRISON SENTENCES ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE CRIME PREVENTION STRATEGY.

48%

Understanding that you may agree with more than one, with which one of the following do you most agree?



When there are more jobs and housing, crime goes down

When there are longer prison sentences, crime goes down

When more crimes are solved, crime goes down

When there are more arrests, crime goes down

When there are cleaner neighborhoods, crime goes down

Don't know

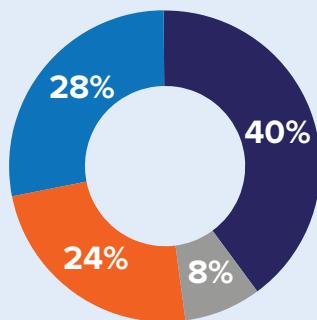
Less than 1 in 4 of all victims of violent crime think that long sentences are the most effective way to stop people from committing repeat crimes.

2 / 3 OF VICTIMS

of violent crime think that the best ways to stop people from committing repeat crimes are mental health and addiction treatment and job training.

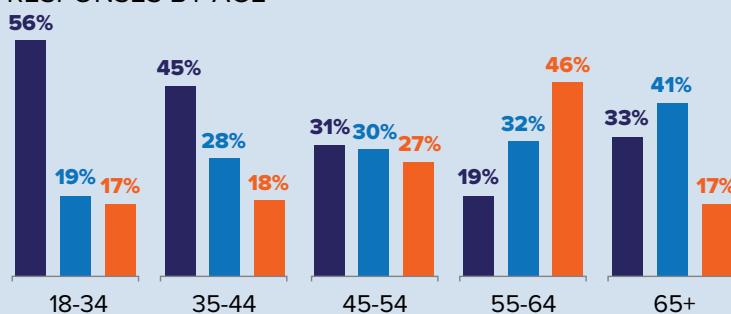


WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO STOP PEOPLE FROM COMMITTING REPEAT CRIMES?

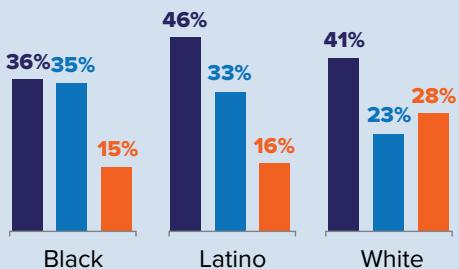


- Mental health or addiction treatment
- Job training and placement
- Long sentences
- Don't know

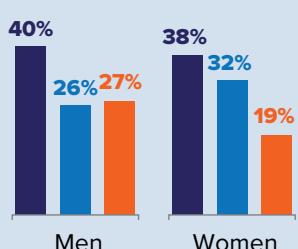
RESPONSES BY AGE



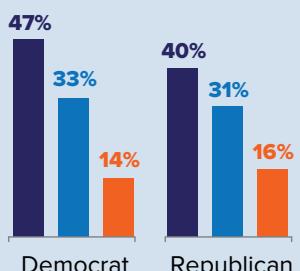
BY RACE



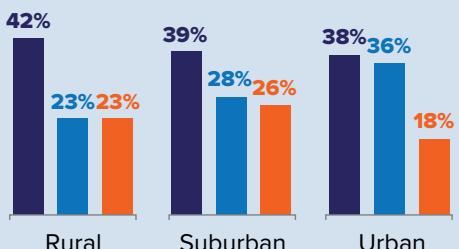
BY GENDER



BY PARTY



BY NEIGHBORHOOD



These data were calculated from similar questions asked of a split sample. All respondents were asked about job training and placement, addiction treatment, and long sentences. One half of the sample was asked about "mental health" and the other about "cognitive behavioral therapy." The results were similar and are presented here under the broader category of "mental health." The percentage of respondents who answered "Don't know" was rounded down from 8.5% to 8% so that the total would be unaffected by rounding.

Victims of violence support candidates who would shorten prison sentences and use the money saved to fund youth violence prevention, mental health and addiction treatment over candidates who support longer prison sentences and maintaining the prison budget to keep people incarcerated for the full length of their sentences.



ALL ELSE BEING EQUAL, FOR WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CANDIDATES WOULD YOU BE MORE LIKELY TO VOTE FOR?

56%

37%

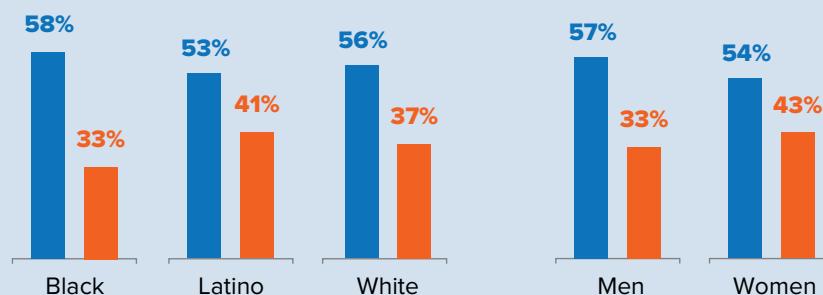
7%

A candidate who supports shorter prison sentences and using money saved to fund youth violence prevention, mental health

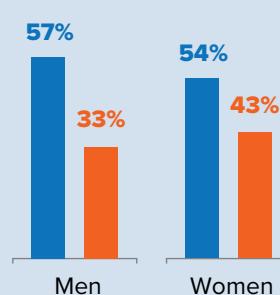
A candidate who supports longer prison sentences and maintaining the prison budget to keep people incarcerated

Don't know

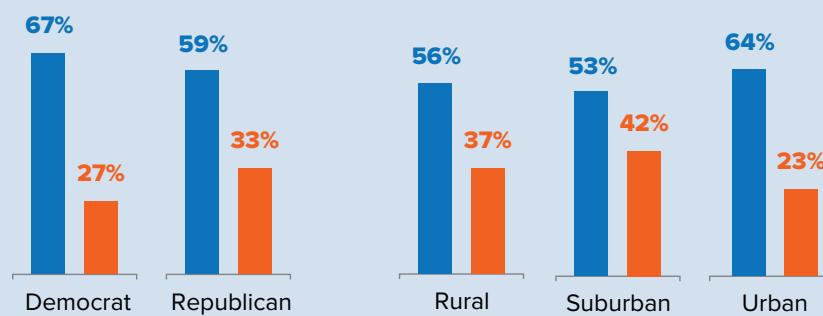
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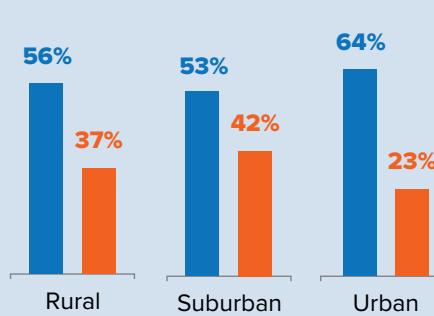
BY GENDER



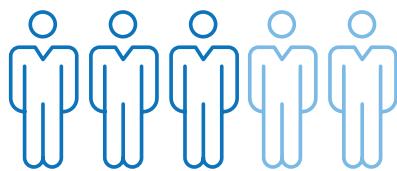
BY PARTY



BY NEIGHBORHOOD



Victims of violence prefer policies that prevent crime by strengthening communities over policies that respond to crime by punishing people who commit crimes.



NEARLY 3 OUT OF 5

victims of violence prefer preventing crime over responding to it.



DO YOU PREFER TO INVEST MORE IN...

58%

Preventing crime by strengthening communities

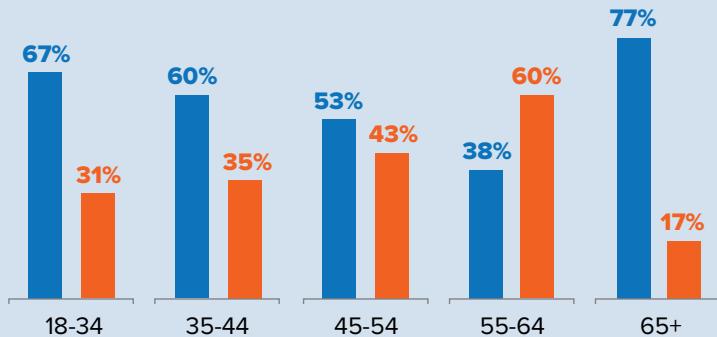
38%

Responding to crime by punishing people who commit crimes

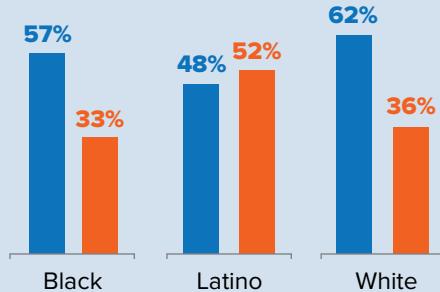
4%

Don't know

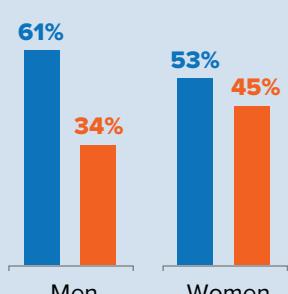
RESPONSES BY AGE



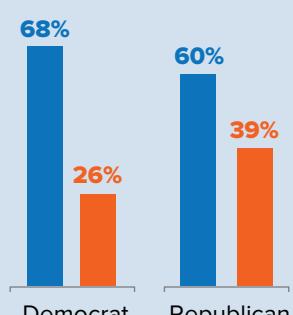
BY RACE



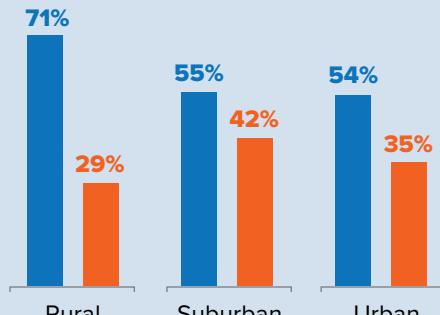
BY GENDER



BY PARTY



BY NEIGHBORHOOD



Nearly two out of three victims of violence think that the most important public safety functions to protect from budget cuts are treatment, prevention, and crisis assistance.

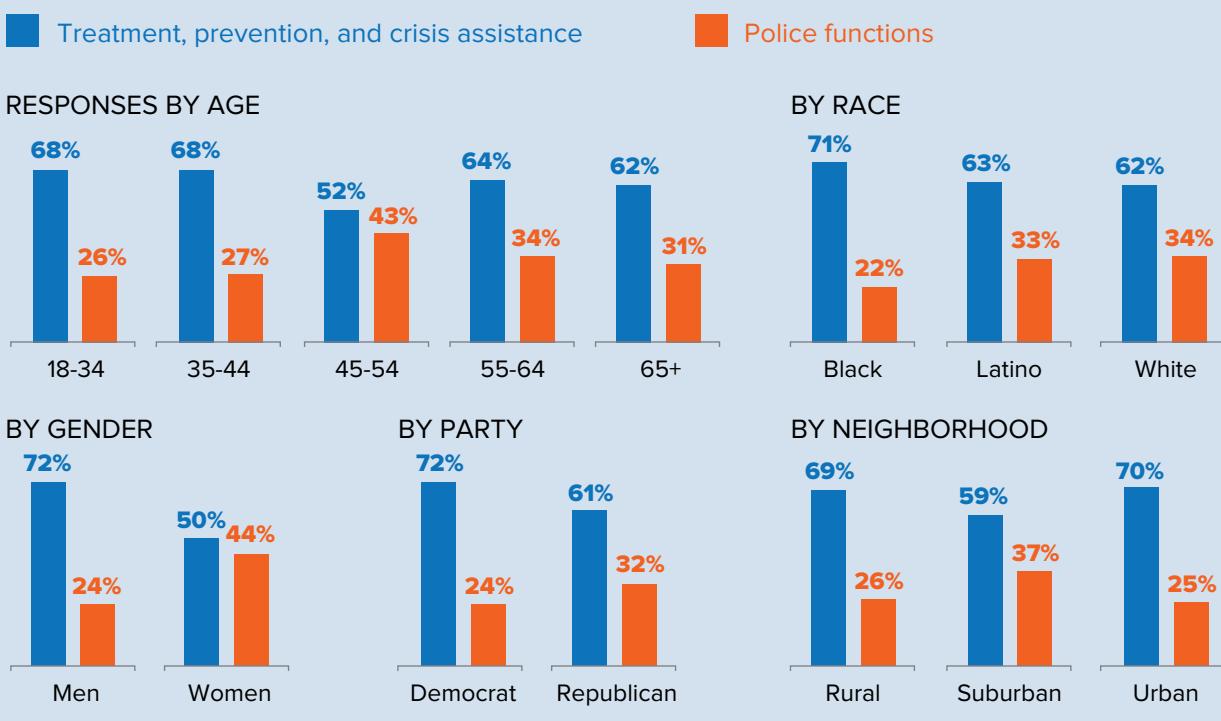
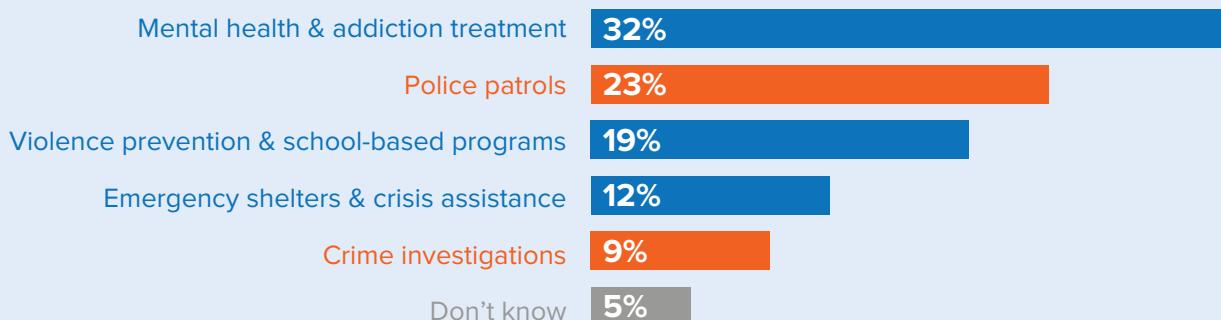
LESS THAN **1** IN **4**

victims of violent crime think that police patrols are the most important public safety service to protect from budget cuts.



Many cities and states are facing a budget crisis as well as increased concerns about public safety.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO PROTECT FROM CUTS FOR YOU PERSONALLY?



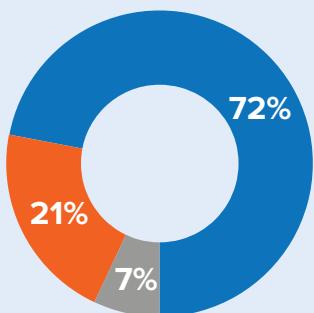
Victims of violence overwhelmingly prefer sentencing policies that allow judges to consider the individual circumstances of the crime.

VICTIMS ARE **2.5X**

more likely to prefer sentencing policies that account for individual circumstances to sentencing policies that require uniform sentencing lengths for all people convicted for specific crime categories.

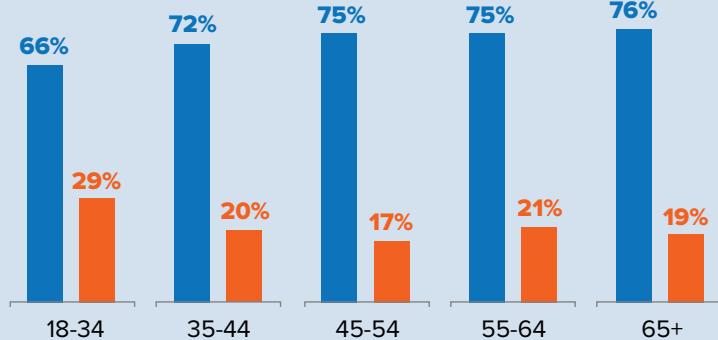


WHEN IT COMES TO SENTENCING POLICY DO YOU PREFER:

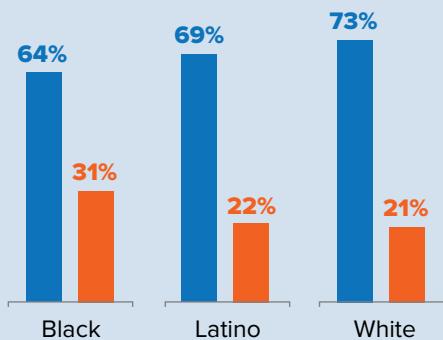


- █ Sentencing policies that authorize judges to consider the individual circumstances of the crime, the victim, and the perpetrator when determining the length of a sentence
- █ Sentencing policies that require uniform sentencing lengths for all people convicted for specific crime categories
- █ Don't know

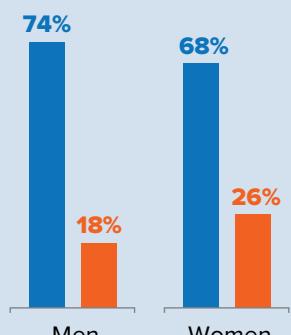
RESPONSES BY AGE



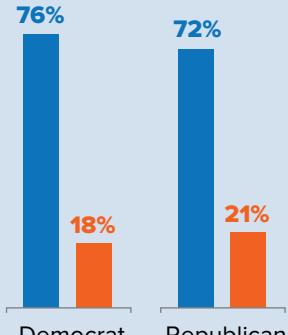
BY RACE



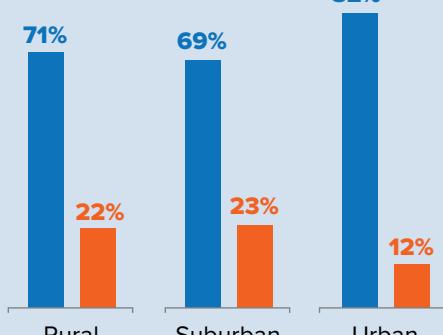
BY GENDER



BY PARTY



BY NEIGHBORHOOD



A strong majority of victims of violence support earned credit policies that authorize corrections officials to provide people in prison credit toward release for participating in education and rehabilitation programs.



WHEN IT COMES TO SENTENCING POLICY, WHICH DO YOU PREFER?

61%

34%

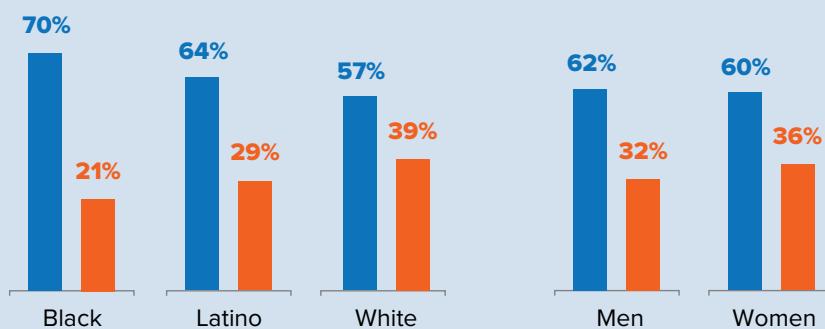
5%

Rehabilitation-focused policies that authorize corrections officials to provide earned credits toward release for people

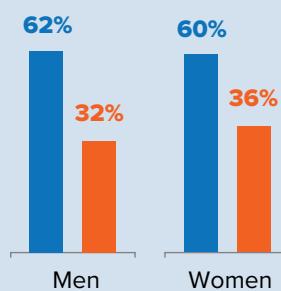
Truth-in-sentencing policies that require everyone to always complete 85% of their court-issued sentence in prison

Don't know

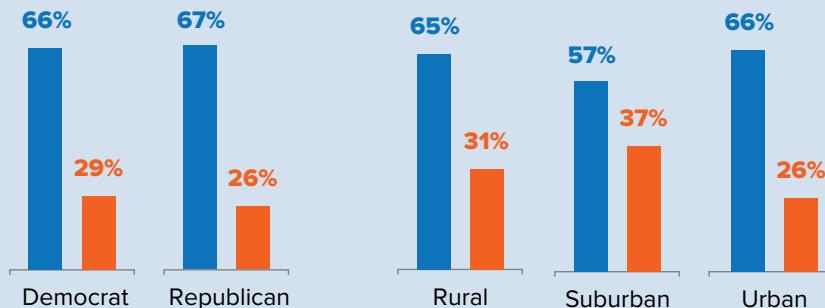
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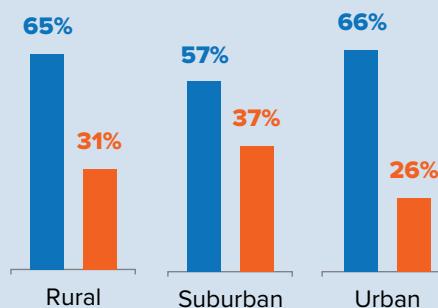
BY GENDER



BY PARTY



BY NEIGHBORHOOD



IT'S TIME FOR A NEW VICTIMS RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The results of this national survey of violent crime victims reveal stark gaps between what victims need to recover from victimization and the support they receive, and between what victims of violence believe would be the best approach to public safety and our nation's current safety investments and policy priorities.

It has never been more urgent to listen to victims and learn from their experiences to fix our broken public safety systems. US spending on police protection and corrections now exceeds \$300 billion annually, up from less than \$40 billion annually in 1982. Despite these extraordinary expenditures, we continue to shortchange the health and safety solutions victims and communities need to stop crime cycles, recover, and heal.

The vision for safety victims of violence propose

stands in stark contrast to current practices — victims want crime prevention, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, housing, and jobs over lengthy mandatory sentences, increasing arrests, and tough punishments. Victims want access to trauma recovery, protection from job loss and eviction, and support to stabilize their families.

Listening to the experiences and preferences of violent crime victims can -- and should -- guide policymakers toward new solutions that can address the dual crisis of a lack of safety and mass incarceration. Their voices and leadership can solve both problems. Listening to victims, and aligning our safety systems with their needs and policy preferences would transform our nation: from security for some to real safety for all.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The Alliance for Safety and Justice designed this survey in collaboration with David Binder Research (DBR). DBR conducted the survey in English and Spanish, from August 6 to 15, 2024. The total sample size was 1,200 people. Four hundred people were contacted via phone, 400 via text, and 400 through an online panel. Respondents who completed the survey through phone or text were reached through random digit dialing. The margin of error due to sampling for the entire sample is 2.8%. Descriptions of neighborhood type are derived from Jed Kolko's ZIP code classification of urban, rural, and suburban areas.

Four hundred and one respondents indicated that they had been victims of violence within the past ten years, as ascertained by their responses to seven questions asking whether they had experienced

"someone injuring or threatening to injure you with a weapon or physical force," "someone making you afraid for your safety by repeatedly contacting you, stalking you, publicizing information about you, or following you;" "someone taking or trying to take something from you, using force or threat of force;" "someone forcing, or trying to force, sex or sexual contact with you," "someone trying to kill you;" "someone shooting at you with a gun;" "someone forcing you to perform labor or sex work;" and "someone killing your family member or loved one." People who responded "Yes" to any of these questions were categorized as victims of violence. The margin of error due to sampling for victims of violence is 4.6%.

Suggested Citation

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