



# 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 policies 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

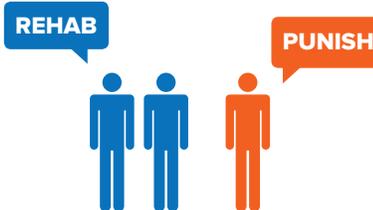


More than four in 10 victims have worried for their safety due to witnessing violence or another crime



**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.