

Latino Decisions / New Mexico SAFE New Mexico Public Safety Poll

Report Summarizing Main Findings



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Executive Summary

Polling commissioned by New Mexico SAFE and conducted by Latino Decisions reveals that New Mexicans are deeply concerned about crime and public safety in their communities. A majority of New Mexicans indicate that they or people in their network have been a victim of crime. They also believe that crime has increased in our state in recent years. Most believe that our criminal justice system is broken and needs to be reformed.

Despite this important context, most New Mexicans believe that incarceration is not the answer to crime in our state. In fact, most respondents indicate that they want criminal justice reform that *reduces* the number of New Mexicans who are incarcerated. Large majorities favor rehabilitation and training over punitive approaches, particularly for people convicted of crimes who have a mental health disability or drug addiction. A majority of New Mexicans believe that even people convicted of a serious or violent crime can turn their lives around and live productive, responsible lives with the right kind of help. Most also understand that bias in policing, prosecution, and sentencing have led to higher incarceration rates for people of color.

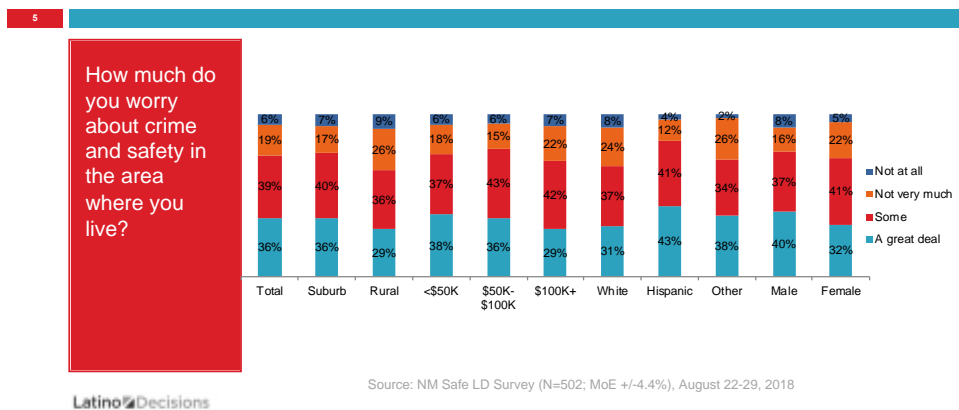
The poll examined what New Mexicans seek from elected officials when it comes to criminal justice reform. Respondents were much more likely to vote for elected officials who support reducing the prison population. They are also more likely to vote for elected officials who support providing funding for rehabilitation, treatment and other programs to reintegrate people with criminal records back into their communities once they are released.

Crime in New Mexico

New Mexico is facing severe challenges associated with public safety. The state has the highest property crime rate in the nation, and is ranked second in the nation for violent crime, behind only Alaska. This context provides the motivation for this study of New Mexican’s experiences with crime and attitudes toward the criminal justice system. The study was commissioned by New Mexico SAFE and conducted by Latino Decisions from August 22-29, 2018.

One of the major themes that emerged from this study is that New Mexicans are very conscious of the environment in which they live, with strong majorities indicating that they believe crime in the state is a problem that requires attention. More specifically, when asked “how much do you worry about crime and safety in the area where you live,” an eye-popping 75% of the sample indicated that they worry either “some” (39%) or a “great deal” (36%). As illustrated in the figure below, this concern with crime and public safety is high across all sub-groups in New Mexico, with the majority of New Mexicans sharing this view regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas, their race or ethnicity, gender, or income.

Most New Mexicans Worry About Crime and Safety



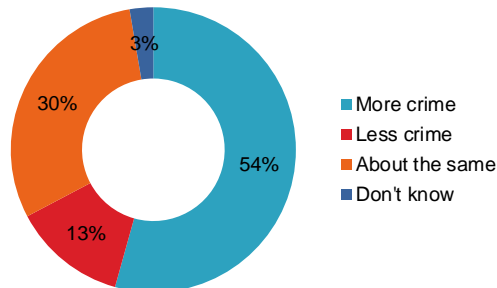
The survey also asked respondents to reveal whether they feel that crime has changed in their community over the past five years. As the figure below depicts, 54% of the sample reported that crime has gotten worse where they live over this time period, with 30% reporting that crime has stayed about the same where they live, and only 13% reporting that there is less crime where live now than there was five years ago.

Has Crime Changed in NM in Last 5 Years?

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Thinking about the area where you live, do you think there is... compared to 5 years ago?

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Source: NM Safe LD Survey (N=502; MoE +/-4.4%), August 22-29, 2018

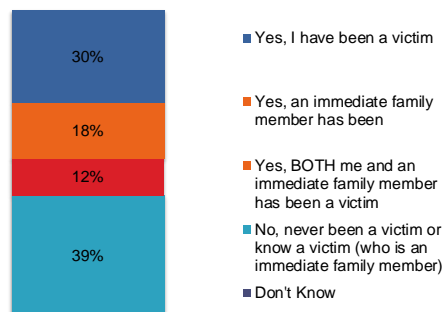
Arguably the most illuminating question in the survey was a query that asked respondents whether they or an immediate family member have been a victim of a crime in New Mexico. As reflected in the figure below, 60% of New Mexicans have been either directly or in-directly affected by crime in the state, with nearly a third of the sample reporting that they themselves have been a victim of a crime. Women are nearly 10 percentage points more likely to be a victim of a crime, but the widest gap in victimization is between urban and rural residents, with 37% of urban residents as opposed to 23% suburban and 26% rural residents indicating they are survivors of crime.

Many New Mexicans Have Been Crime Victims

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Have you or an immediate family member ever been a victim of a crime here in New Mexico?

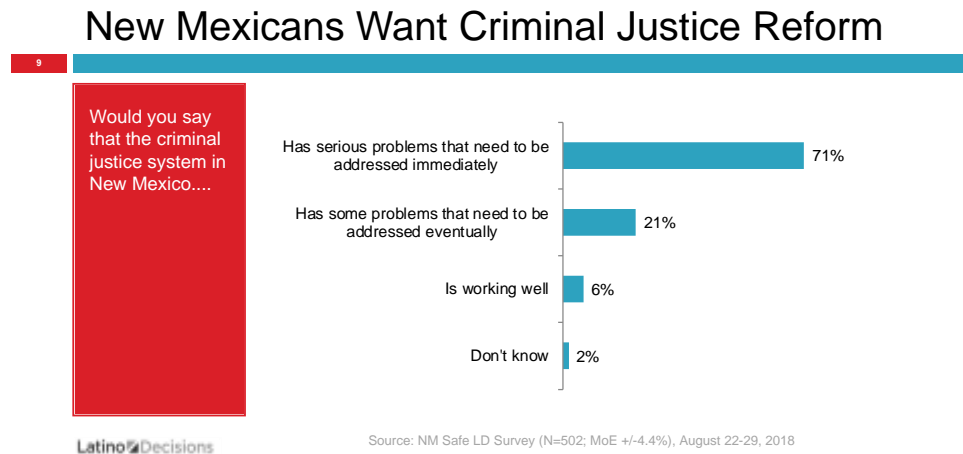
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Source: NM Safe LD Survey (N=502; MoE +/-4.4%), August 22-29, 2018

Criminal Justice Policy Views

In addition to general views of crime and public safety in the state, the poll asked New Mexicans several questions about policy solutions. This section of the poll started with a general question about the state of the criminal justice system in New Mexico. When asked to choose from three general statements representing the status of the criminal justice system, the majority of New Mexicans (71%) felt that the criminal justice system in New Mexico has “serious problems that need to be addressed immediately,” compared to 21% who believe that the “system has problems that need to be addressed eventually”. This item in the poll therefore not only reveals that New Mexicans support reform, but that they have a strong sense of urgency about the need to reform the system.



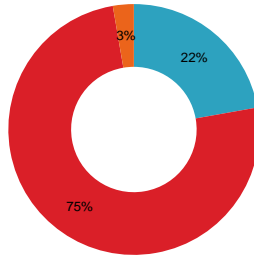
Although it is clear from the item above that New Mexicans want reform, to help guide our state’s decision-makers the survey includes several questions designed to clarify what reforms the public would support being implemented. The results make clear that New Mexicans prefer rehabilitation over imprisonment by very wide margins. For example, when asked if they prefer “rehabilitation and training that would help criminals become productive citizens” or “making prison as hard and unpleasant as possible to make people convicted of crimes scared to come back,” 75% of respondents choose the rehabilitation and training approach.

New Mexicans Support Rehabilitation Over Punitive Approaches to Address Crime

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Which of the following would do more to prevent people convicted of crimes from committing further offenses once they're released from prison?

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- Making prison as hard and unpleasant as possible so they are afraid of going back
- Providing rehabilitation services and training so they can re-enter society and be productive citizens
- Don't Know

Source: NM Safe LD Survey (N=502; MoE +/-4.4%), August 22-29, 2018

The survey also shows that most New Mexicans (70%) believe it is important to reduce the number of people who are in prison in the state (see figure below). This includes 39% who believe it is very important.

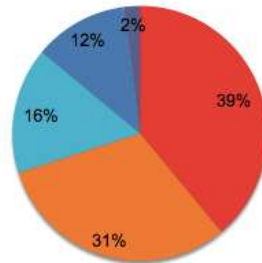
New Mexicans Believe that Reducing the number of People Who Are in Prison in the State Is Important

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Seventy percent of those polled believe it is important to reduce the number of people in prison.

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How important is it to reduce the number of people who are in prison in New Mexico today?



- Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Not Very Important
- Not Important at All
- Don't Know

Source: NM Safe LD Survey (N=502; MoE +/-3.3%), August 22-29, 2018

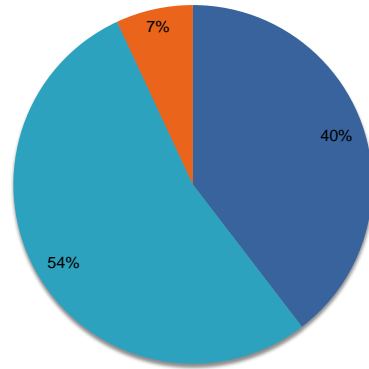
The responses to another item in the survey showed that 54% believe that reducing the incarcerated population will save taxpayer dollars that can be reinvested into preventing crime and rehabilitating people convicted of crime.

The Majority of New Mexicans Believe that Reducing the Number of People in Prison Would Help Communities

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In your view, would making reforms that reduce the prison population...

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- Harm communities because people who belong behind bars will be let out
- Help communities by saving taxpayer dollars that can be reinvested into preventing crime and rehabilitating people convicted of crimes
- Don't Know

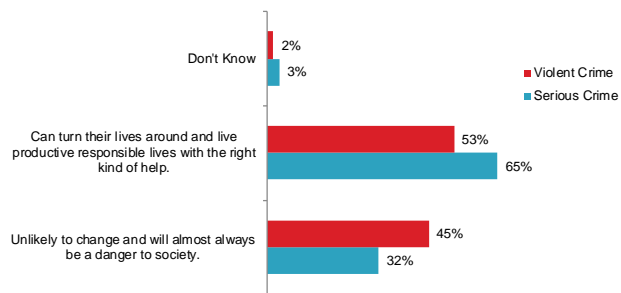
Another major theme that emerged from the survey is that most New Mexicans believe that even people convicted of violent crime can be reformed. This is an important detail given that, as noted above, New Mexico has the second highest violent crime rate in the nation after Alaska.¹

Most New Mexicans Believe that Even Violent Criminals Can Be Rehabilitated

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Which statement do you agree with more?

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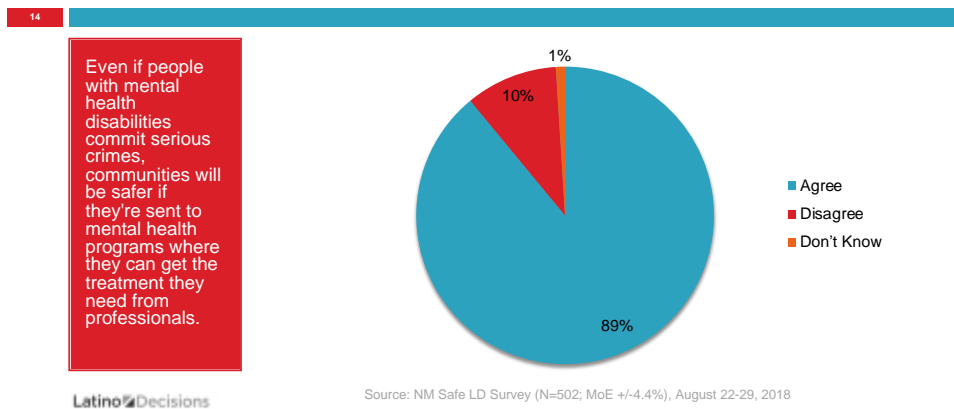


Source: NM Safe LD Survey (N=502; MoE +/-4.4%), August 22-29, 2018

¹ See the following for an overview of NM crime rates across different categories of crime: <https://www.abqjournal.com/1070918/at-a-glance-crime-in-albuquerque-and-new-mexico.html>

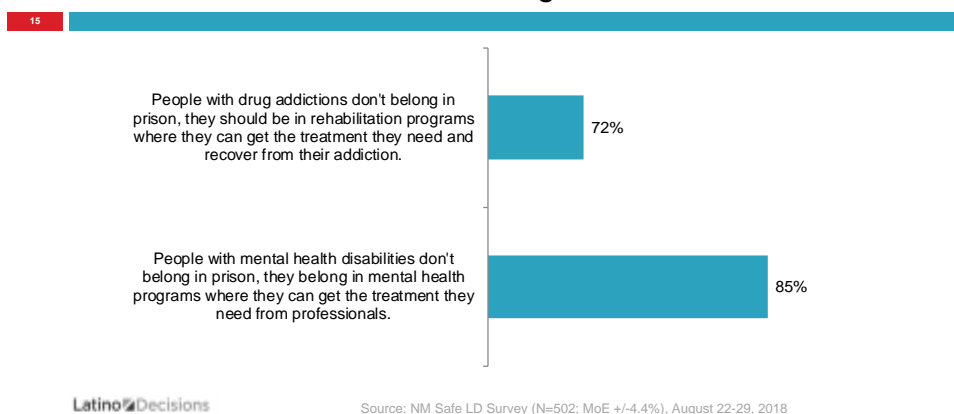
A very large majority of New Mexicans (89%) likewise believes that our communities will be safer if people with mental health disabilities who have committed crimes can get the treatment they need from professionals.

The Vast Majority of New Mexicans Believe That Our Communities Will be Safer if People With Mental Disabilities Who Commit Serious Crimes Receive Treatment



Social science research has identified that the challenges New Mexico is facing with mental health and substance abuse have significant consequences for the state’s crime and safety problems. In fact, alcohol and drugs are estimated to account for up to 80% of all crimes that lead to incarceration in the United States.² The survey therefore includes multiple measures of how New Mexicans prefer to handle citizens who break the law and who suffer from mental health disabilities or drug addictions. One of the main findings from the poll is that large majorities support treatment over incarceration for both categories – with 85% preferring treatment for people with a mental health disability and 72% preferring treatment for people with drug addictions. In either case, New Mexicans overwhelmingly prefer treatment to prison.

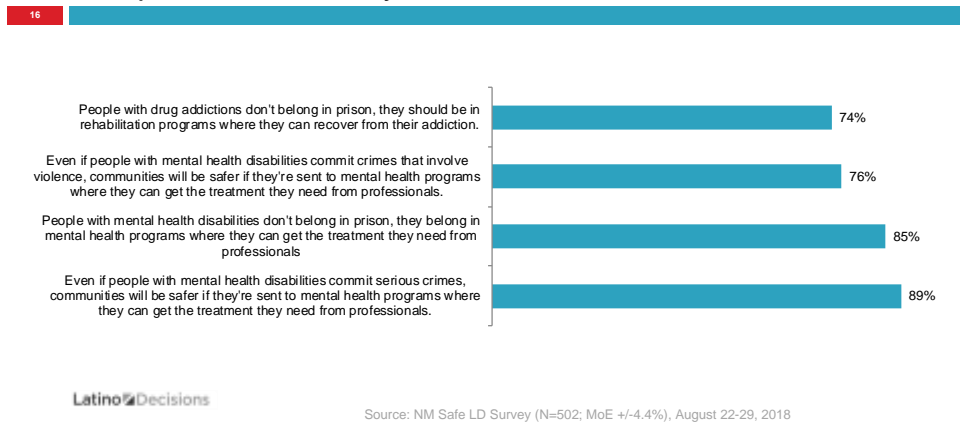
Large Majorities Support Treatment – Not Incarceration – for both Mental Health and Drug Addiction



² <https://www.ncadd.org/about-addiction/alcohol-drugs-and-crime>

The survey takes a very comprehensive approach to analyze the public’s attitudes toward criminal justice policy in New Mexico. This is reflected in the many questions the survey includes to capture how the public prefers to handle people who have committed crimes due to mental health or drug addiction challenges. As exemplified below, the views of New Mexicans are highly consistent regardless of what angle we explored the issue.

Our Polling Looked at This Issue from Multiple Angles and Responses Were Very Consistent



Bias in the Criminal Justice System

New Mexico’s demographic profile as a state where people of color are the majority requires an analysis of racial and ethnic inequality in the state’s criminal justice system. As of 2016, Hispanic, Black and Native American New Mexicans were all over-represented among New Mexico’s incarcerated population, meaning that each group has a higher incarceration rate than their overall percentage of the state’s population. Conversely, while comprising 38% of the state’s population, non-Hispanic Whites only have a 24.7% incarceration rate.

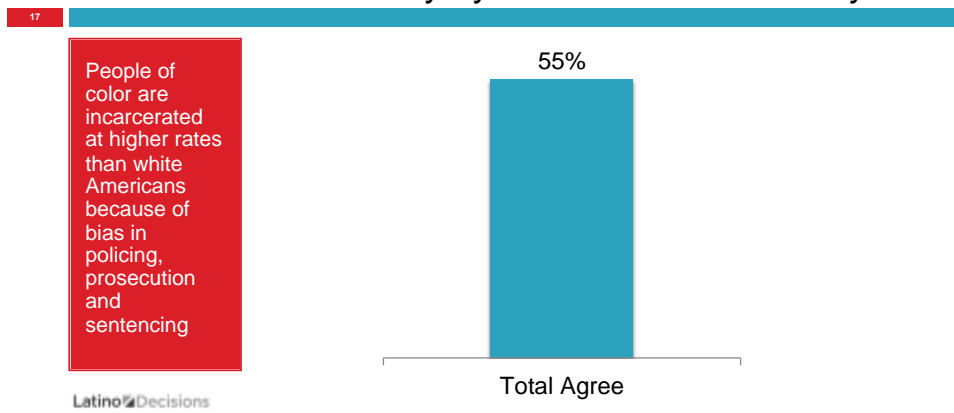
Prisoners in New Mexico December, 2016

Race/Ethnicity	Total Number Incarcerated	Percent Incarcerated	Percent of NM Population
Total	7,055	100%	100%
White	1,741	24.7%	38.1%
Hispanic	4,141	58.7%	48.5%
Black	497	7%	2.5%
Native	485	6.9%	10.6%

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), National Prisoner Statistics (NPS), 2016; and Federal Justice Statistics Program (FJSP), 2016 (preliminary); U.S Census 2016.

The survey provides indicators of the state’s attitudes regarding bias in the criminal justice system. Fifty-five percent of New Mexicans believe that people of color are incarcerated at higher rates due to bias in policing, prosecution, and sentences.

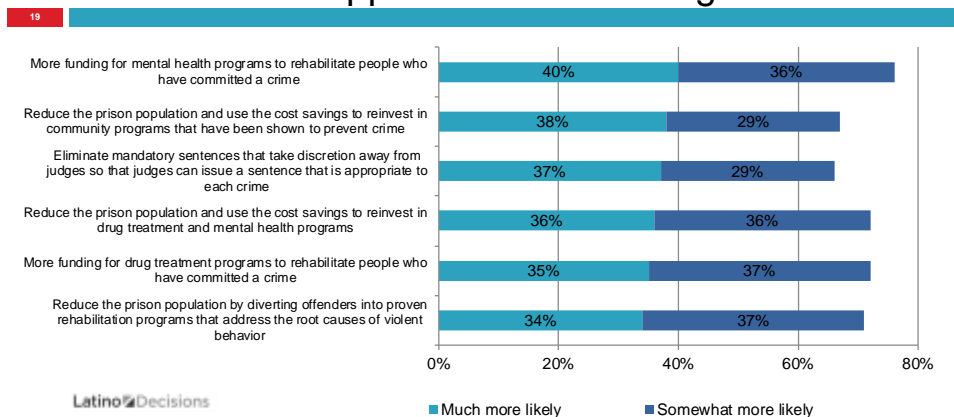
A Majority of New Mexicans Understand that People of Color are Treated Unfairly by the Criminal Justice System



What New Mexicans Want from Their Elected Officials

The final section of the survey focused on what New Mexicans want their elected officials to do to address problems in the criminal justice system. Respondents were asked to indicate whether having elected officials support a specific policy proposal would make them more or less likely to want to vote for that person. Large majorities of respondents indicated that they would be more likely to vote for elected officials who support rehabilitation over incarceration.

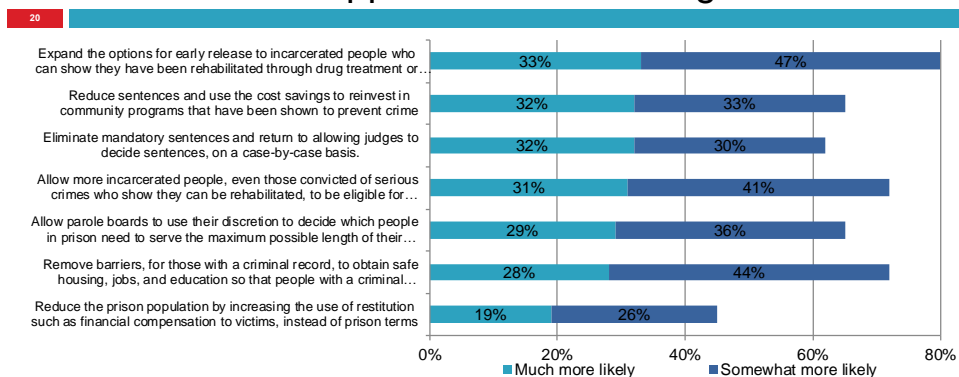
Would You be More Likely to Vote for an Elected Official Who Supported the Following?



When viewed collectively, the data suggests that our state’s elected leaders can be confident in pursuing criminal justice reform focused on prioritizing prevention rather than punishment for New Mexicans who are convicted of committing crimes. However, it is important to note some

nuances across the themes we tested in the survey. For example, one of the themes that did not prove to be very effective in the survey was suggesting that the use of restitution toward the victim could be used as an alternative to incarceration. Only 45% of the sample indicated that they would be more likely to vote for an elected leader who supported this approach. That said, only 39% of the sample reported that this would make them less likely to vote for a candidate who supported the idea. Eleven percent said it would have no impact on their vote.

Would You be More Likely to Vote for an Elected Official Who Supported the Following?



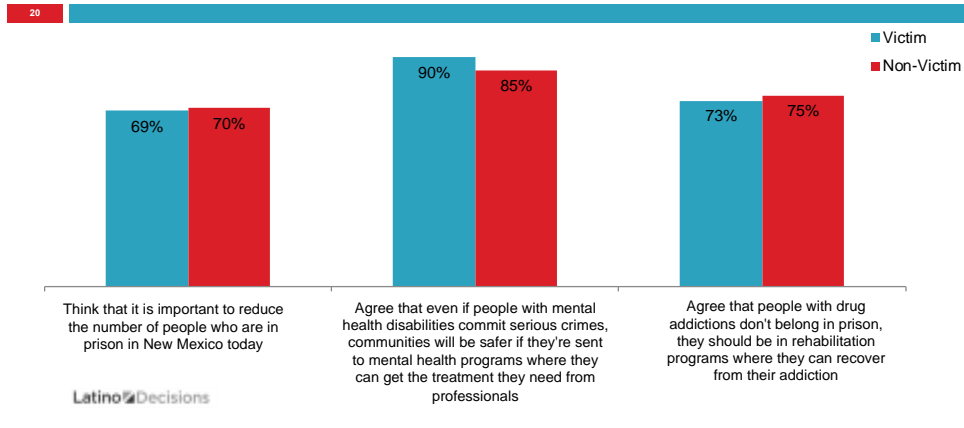
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Source: NM Safe LD Survey (N=502; MoE +/-4.4%), August 22-29, 2018

Attitudes of Victims of Crime Compared to Non-Victims

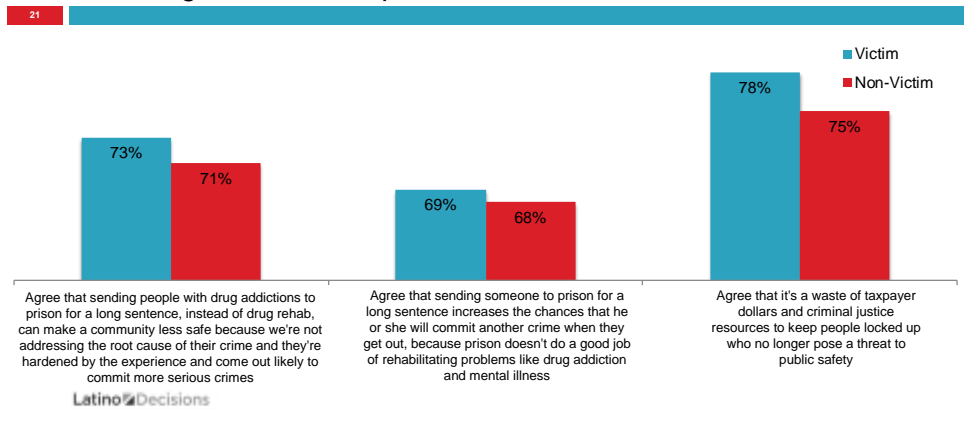
A particularly important finding from this poll is that in most cases survivors of crime support rehabilitation over incarceration just as much as non-victims. This is an important discussion, as the survey reveals that essentially a third of New Mexicans have been a victim of a crime and 60% have been in-directly impacted by crime due to a member of their network being victimized. As reflected in the figure below, when we compare victims to non-victims we consistently find that respondents who have survived a crime are just as supportive of reduce the number of people who are incarcerated (69% for victims/70% for non-victims), and just as likely to believe that people with drug addictions should be in rehabilitation and not prison (73% for victims/75% non-victims). Interestingly, survivors of crime are more likely to agree that if people with mental health disabilities commit serious crimes communities would be safer if they received the treatment they need.

Crime Victims in New Mexico Are Just as Likely to Support Reducing the Prison Population and Rehabilitation as Non-victims



The survey also finds that victims of crime are also more likely to agree with a statement that sending people with drug addictions to prison instead of rehab can make communities less safe because we are not addressing the root cause of their crime (see figure below). Similarly, victims of crime are more likely to believe that keeping people locked up who no longer pose a threat to public safety is a waste of taxpayer dollars and criminal justice resources (78% for Victims/75% for non-Victims). When taken collectively, the survey makes clear that while many New Mexicans have survived crime experiences, this has not led them to support more punitive views toward criminal justice. In fact, the overwhelming majority of crime victims support rehabilitation for New Mexicans who have been convicted of crimes, particularly those who suffer from mental health or drug addiction challenges.

Crime Victims in New Mexico Are Just as Likely to Support Reducing the Prison Population and Rehabilitation as Non-victims



Conclusions/ Primary Findings

This study of New Mexican's experiences with crime and their attitudes toward the criminal justice system provides important information to guide policy decisions at a time when the state unfortunately has among the very highest property and violent crime rates in the country. This final section of the report briefly highlights some of the main findings that have emerged from the data.

- One of the major themes that emerged from this study is that New Mexicans recognize that the state is facing significant challenges in the area of crime, as strong majorities indicate that they believe crime in the state is a problem that requires attention, and 75% report that they worry about crime.
- A majority of respondents also have direct or in-direct experiences with crime, one-third of the sample reporting that they have been the victim of a crime. However, most New Mexicans want criminal justice reform that reduces the number of New Mexicans who are incarcerated, including most victims of crime.
- New Mexicans favor rehabilitation and training over punitive approaches to address problems in our criminal justice system, and believe that people who commit crimes are capable of turning their lives around. Large majorities of New Mexicans support rehabilitation for people convicted of crimes who have a mental health disability or drug addiction. A majority of New Mexicans also believe that even people convicted of a serious or violent crime can turn their lives around and live productive, responsible lives with the right kind of help.” Even a majority of victims of crime support rehabilitation as a means of reducing the incarcerated population in New Mexico.
- Most New Mexicans believe that bias in policing, prosecution, and sentencing have led to higher incarceration rates for people of color. These attitudes are also influential to the way New Mexicans view political candidates. For example, New Mexicans are much more likely to vote for elected officials who support reducing the prison population. They are also more likely to vote for elected officials who support providing funding for rehabilitation, treatment and other programs to reintegrate people with criminal records back into their communities once they are released

Research Design/Methods Statement

On behalf of New Mexico SAFE, Latino Decisions surveyed 502 adults between August 22-29, 2018. Interviews were collected via landline, cell phone, and the web. The phone portion was conducted by live interviewers who were bilingual and administered the survey in the language of preference of respondents. The sample was comprised of 51% male and 49% female respondents, with 50% of respondents being Hispanic, 41% non-Hispanic White, 5% Native American, and the remaining percentage comprised of African American and Asian American residents of New Mexico. The survey also consisted of 41% self-defined Democrats, 27% Republicans, and 28% Independent/Other Party, 34% self-defined Liberal, 25% Moderate, and 32% Conservative with the remaining percentages either refusing to provide a response or indicating they were unsure of their party or ideology. The full data are weighted to match the registered voter population in New Mexico across the following key demographics indicators of gender, education, nativity, ancestry, and race/ethnicity. A post-stratification raking algorithm was used to balance each category to the ACS estimates. The survey carries a margin of error of +/- 4.4 percentage points and had an average length of 16 minutes to complete. For questions on methodology please contact: Dr. Gabriel R. Sanchez, gabriel.sanchez@latinodecisions.com.