

G B A O

# Center for American Progress Action Fund Criminal Justice Reform National Survey

August 2019

*Base Sample N=1,000 registered voters  
Oversample of 400 Self-ID Democrats  
Conducted July 8-15, 2019 online  
Margin of error = +/- 3.1 percentage points*

## National Registered Voters



GBAO conducted a survey of 1,000 registered voters from July 8-15, 2019 online, plus a 400-person Self-ID Democratic Voter Oversample. The margin of error is +/- 3.1%.

- The chicken and the egg – Voters don't rank Criminal Justice Reform (CJR) among their top priorities, and/but voters are not hearing about the issue from media or candidates
- The 15% of voters focused on CJR are very young (31% 18-29, 71% under 50) and disproportionately Democratic, female, people of color, and non-college
- Voters currently associate criminal justice reform with changes in prison sentencing and subjective values such as justice and fairness
  - Open-end responses reveal some voters already understand the issue very well, but others see it as a call for more extreme 'get tough on crime' absolutism
- Reducing the number of individuals incarcerated is not a goal unto itself for most voters and is not automatically seen as making communities safer; we have to affirmatively make that case

A photograph of a long, straight asphalt road stretching into the distance under a cloudy sky. The road has a white dashed line down the center. The landscape is flat with dry grass and some trees in the distance. A dark blue banner is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

# Political Climate

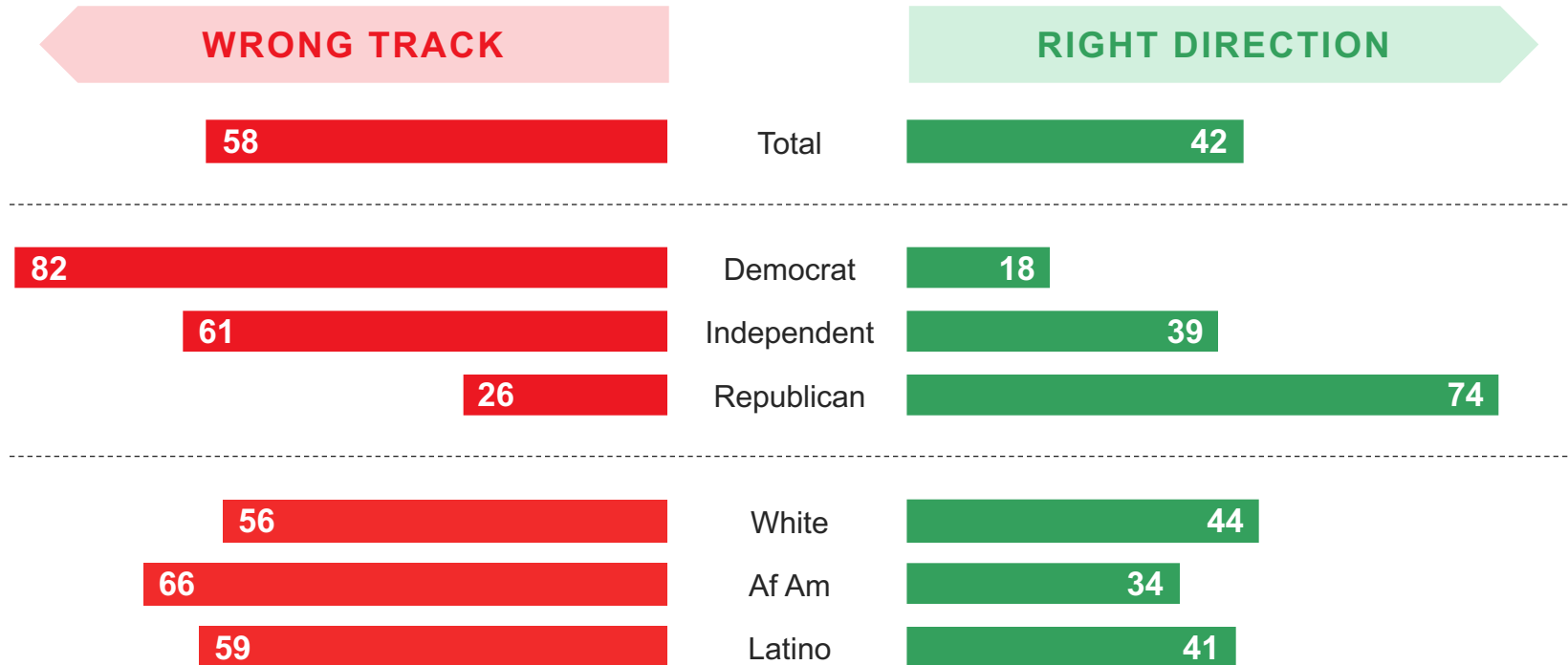


# Voters Are Very Negative On Direction, Only Republicans Are Positive

Figure 5

## Direction of the Country

*Generally speaking, do you think that things in this country are going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?*



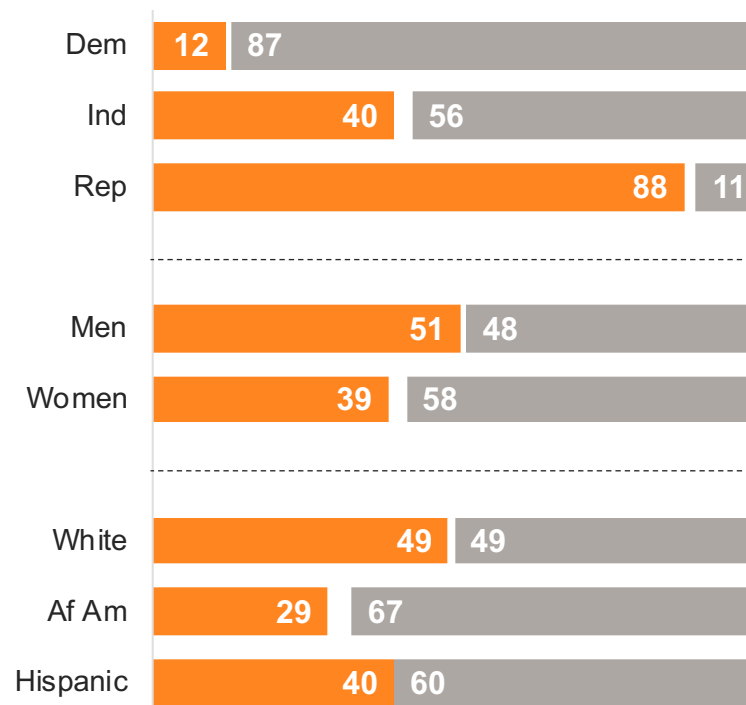
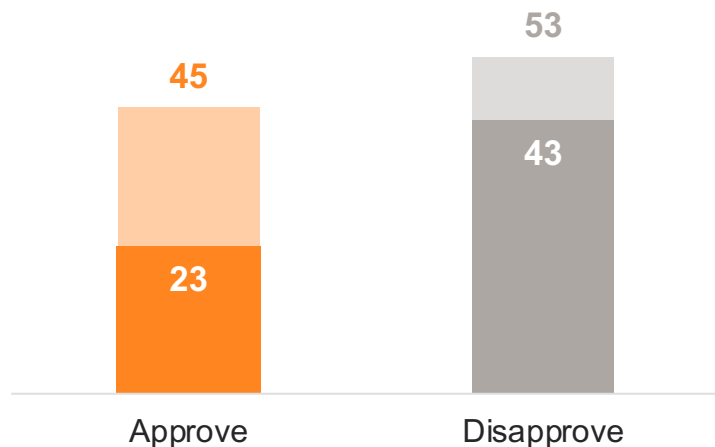
# Large Racial, Gender, And Partisan Divides On Trump Approval

Figure 6

## Trump Job Approval

*Do you approve or disapprove of the job Donald Trump is doing as President?*

*Darker shade = Stronger intensity*



# Criminal Justice Reform Resonates Most With African Americans

Figure 7

## Voter Priorities

*Please indicate which THREE of the issues below will be most important in determining how you will vote in next year's elections for President and Congress.*

<i>% one of the most important</i>	Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Af Am	Latino
Reducing health care costs	64	55	41	55	47	50
Ensuring that U.S. workers have good jobs and high wages	42	41	33	36	45	46
Protecting the U.S. from terrorism	23	30	52	37	34	21
Strengthening our borders	9	29	66	39	13	21
Reducing gun violence	48	30	17	29	47	44
Cutting government spending and reducing the deficit	21	38	41	33	29	26
Lowering taxes	29	30	33	29	40	32
Addressing the causes and consequences of climate change	44	31	10	30	17	38
Reforming the criminal justice system	20	17	7	12	28	22

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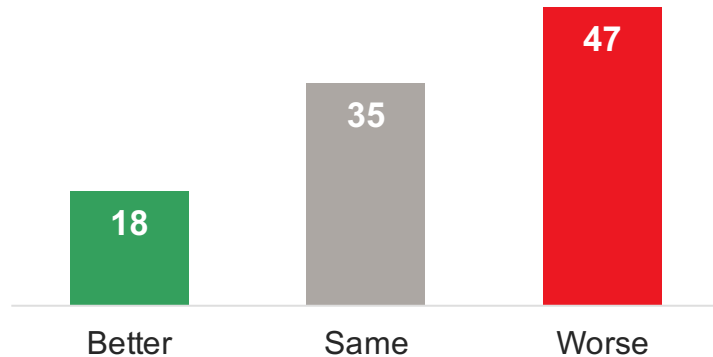
# **Criminal Justice Reform**



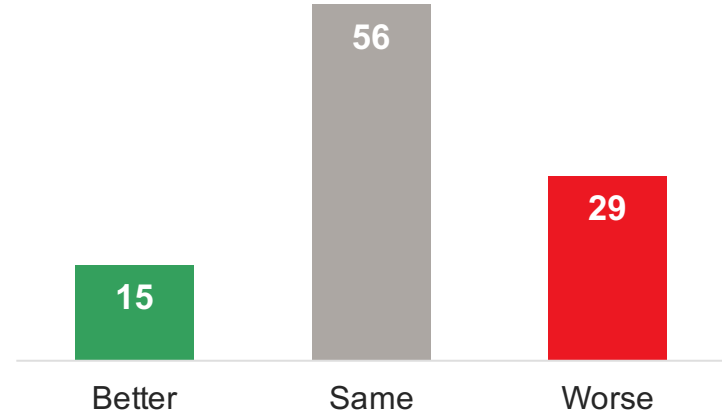
# Split Between Perceptions Of Local And National Crime

Figure 9

**(Split A)** Over the last few years, do you think crime in the U.S. has gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?



**(Split B)** Over the last few years, do you think crime in your community has gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?

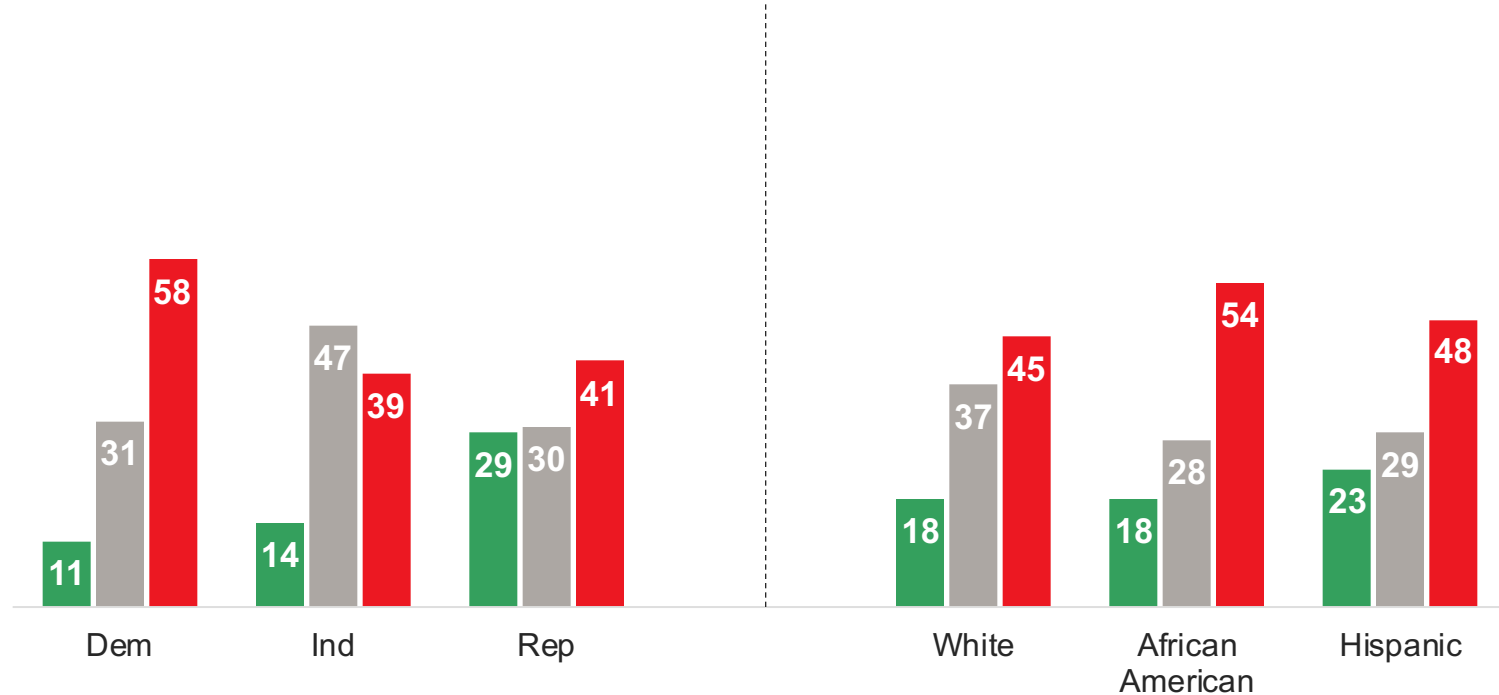


# Trump Effect – Republicans, Whites Less Likely To Say Crime Getting Worse

Figure 10

## U.S. Crime

● Better ● Same ● Worse

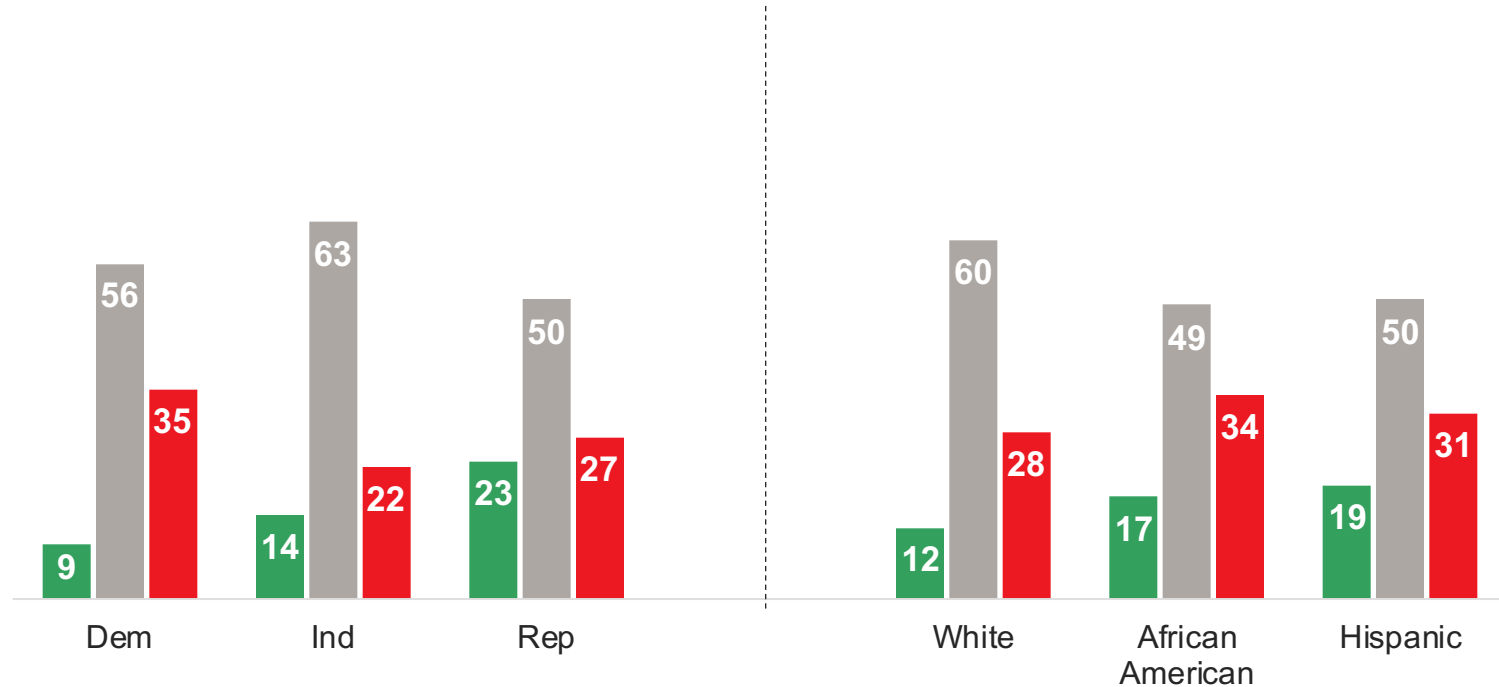


# Most Think Crime In Their Communities Has Not Changed

Figure 11

## Community Crime

● Better ● Same ● Worse



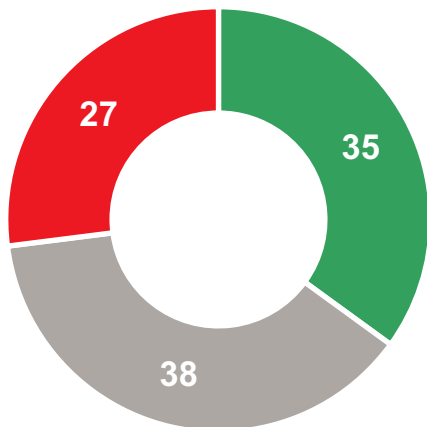
# Most Voters Have Not Heard Much About CJR From Media Or Presidential Candidates

Figure 12

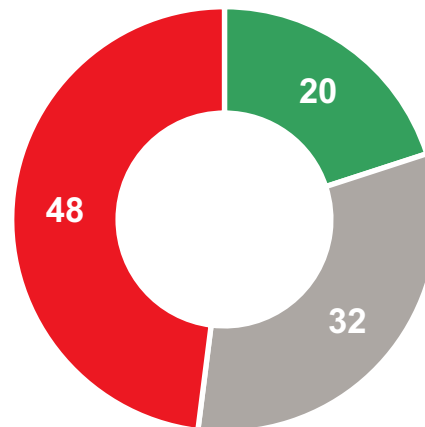
## Heard About CJR

● A great deal/Quite a bit   ● Some   ● Not too much/Almost none

*Heard About Criminal Justice Reform From  
Social Media & News*



*Heard About Criminal Justice Reform  
From Presidential Candidates*





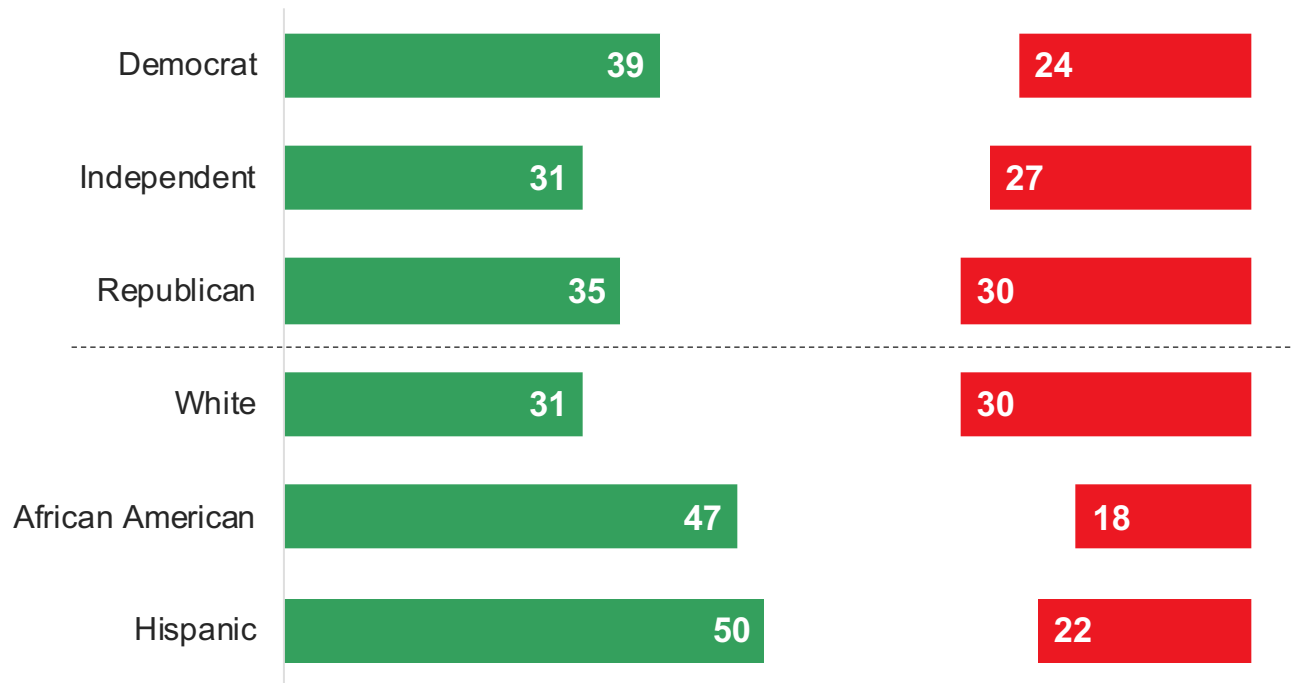
# Small Partisan Gap, Big Racial Gap On Hearing About CJR From Media

Figure 13

## CJR Heard Media

*One of the choices in a previous question about the most important issues determining your vote in next year's elections was "reforming the criminal justice system." How much do you hear about this issue in the news, on social media, or from other sources?*

- A great deal/Quite a bit
- Not too much/Almost none



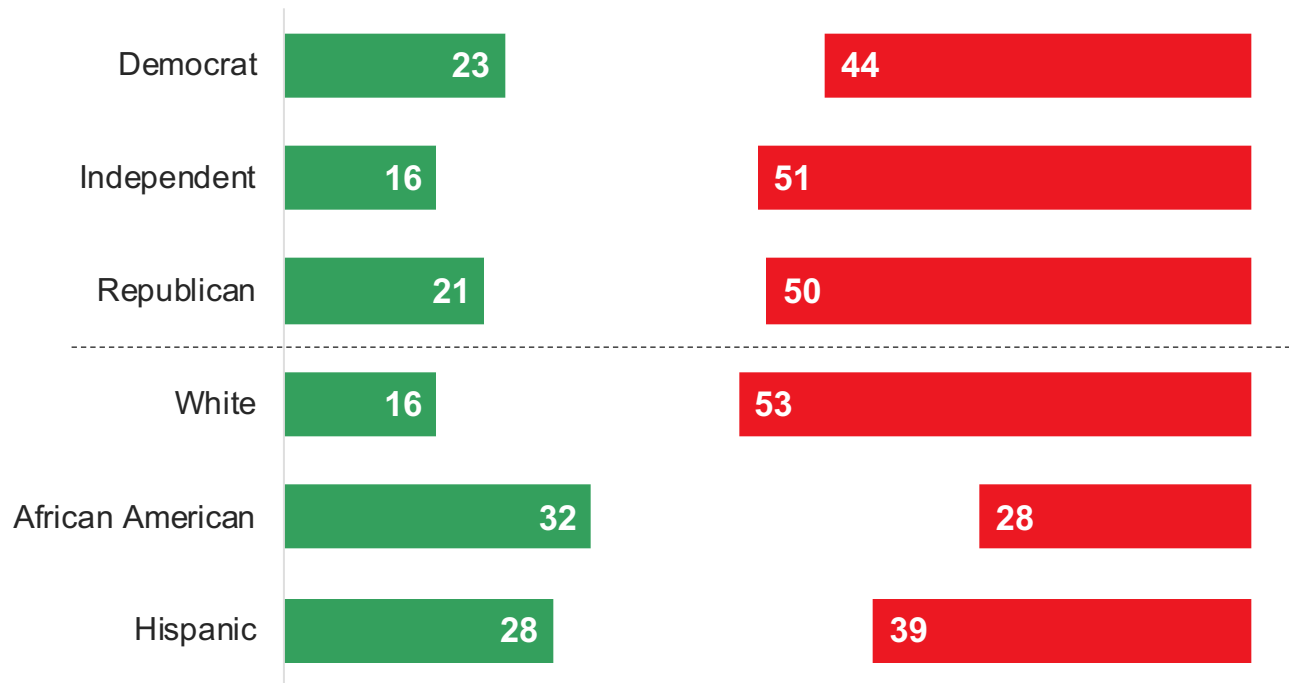
# In Midst Of Primary, Less Than 1-in-4 Democrats Hearing About CJR From Presidential Candidates

Figure 14

## CJR Heard Presidential

*Thinking specifically about the election for President next year, how much have you heard about criminal justice reform from the candidates running for president?*

- A great deal/Quite a bit
- Not too much/Almost none



# Voters Who Prioritize Criminal Justice Reform Tend To Be Racial Minorities, Younger, More Female, Less Educated, And More Democratic

Figure 15

**Criminal Justice Voters = “Reforming Our Criminal Justice System” among top three issues**

	All Voters	CJR Voters
White	70	53
African-American	13	<b>24</b>
Latino	11	16
Women	53	59
Men	47	40
College	41	30
Non-college	59	<b>70</b>

	All Voters	CJR Voters
18-29	16	<b>31</b>
30-39	17	21
40-49	16	19
50-64	27	20
65+	24	9
Dem	38	<b>51</b>
Ind	30	34
Rep	32	16

## Figure 16

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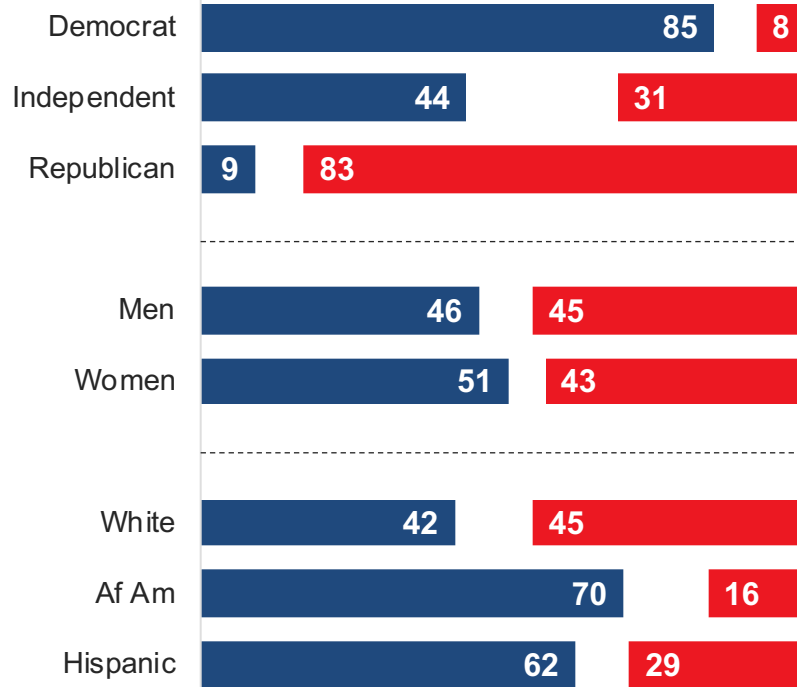
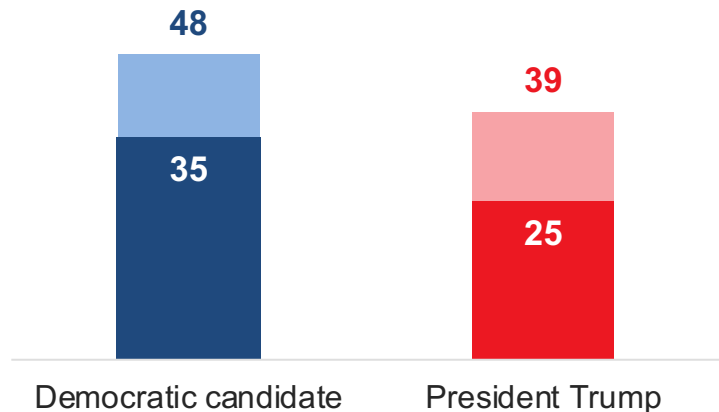
# Democratic Edge On CJR Built on Racial Minorities, Independents

Figure 17

## Trust on CJR

*Regardless of how you plan to vote, who would you trust more when it comes to reforming the criminal justice system - President Trump or a Democratic candidate for President?*

*Darker shade = Strong support*

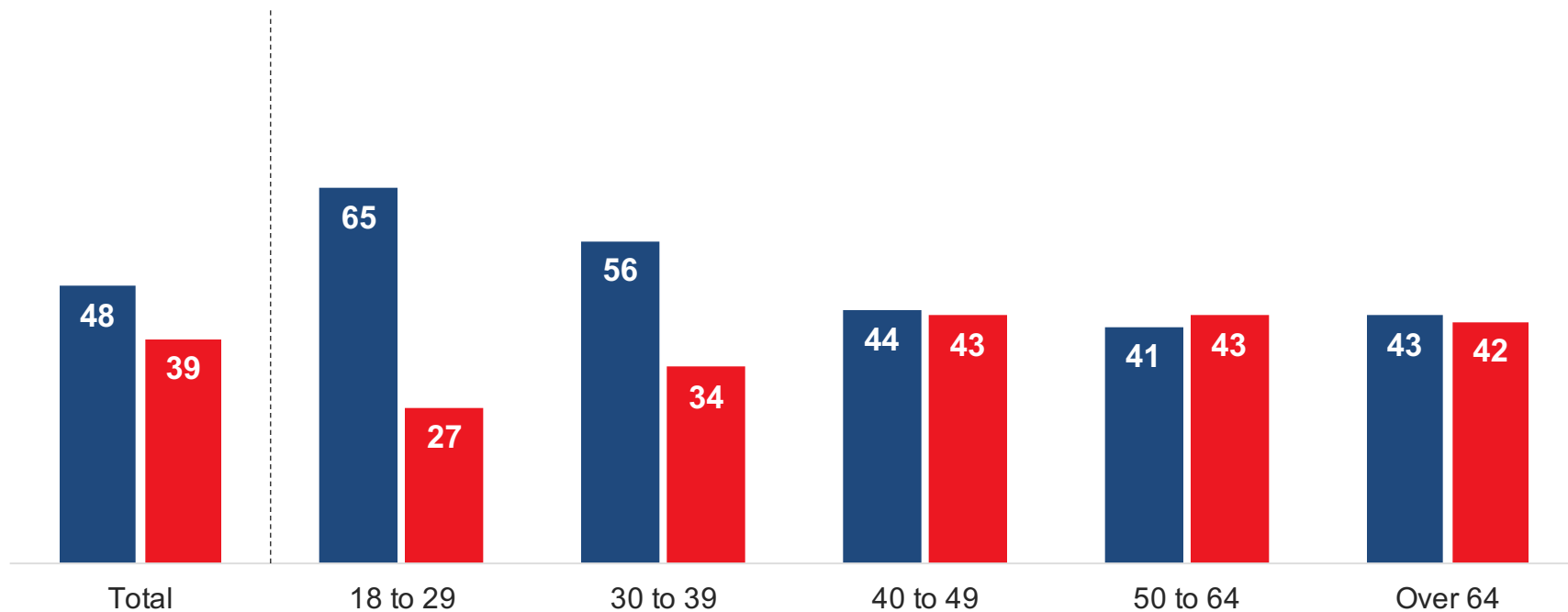


# Huge Age Divide On Partisan Trust On CJR Fueled By Those Under 40

Figure 18

## Trust on CJR by Age

● Total Democrat ● Total Trump





# **Value Propositions**

# Two-Tiered System, War On Drugs Failure, And Need For Mental Health / Substance Abuse Treatment Over Prison Are Broadly Accepted

Figure 20

## CJR Value Propositions

*Percent selecting 5-7 on a 7-point scale*

We should not have two standards of justice where rich people accused of crimes are allowed to stay at home prior to their court dates, while those who are poor must stay in jail for weeks or months simply because they cannot afford bail.

74

Police forces are doing their best in dangerous situations, and we should do more to support them and stop criticizing them.

65

The war on drugs has failed - more drugs than ever are entering our communities and too many people have been locked up in prison and jail for long sentences.

64

Those with mental health disabilities or substance abuse problems should not be in prison, they must be provided treatment by health professionals.

63



# Statements on Racial Injustices, Excesses Of Current System Get Strong Overall Marks, But Significant Partisan Divide Emerges

Figure 21

## CJR Value Propositions

*Percent selecting 5-7 on a 7-point scale*

(Split) Racial profiling of African Americans by police forces is a major problem in many communities, and we must take stronger steps to ensure fair treatment of all citizens.

60

(Split) Racial profiling of African Americans by police forces is a major problem in many communities, and we must take stronger steps to ensure that police are held accountable for this type of misconduct.

57

Our country relies too much on criminalizing behavior to make communities safe. There are smarter, less expensive, and more humane ways to deal with many societal problems outside of the criminal justice system.

56

Overly long sentences and harsh conditions in many U.S. prisons and jails today go beyond justice, and unfairly take away the dignity of those serving time.

55

The criminal justice system - including police, lawyers, judges, and prisons - is systemically biased against African Americans and other people of color.

49

# Traditional Positions, Progressive Connection Between Reduced Incarceration And Safer Communities Score Much Lower

Figure 22

## CJR Value Propositions

*Percent selecting 5-7 on a 7-point scale*

(Split) Undocumented immigrants and other minority groups commit disproportionately more crimes, and that is why these groups are more often targeted by law enforcement than others.

46

Making communities safer is a straightforward issue - the more we spend on police, prosecutors, courts, and prisons, the safer our communities will be.

46

(Split) Young African American men commit disproportionately more crimes, and that is why they are more often targeted by law enforcement than others.

45

Reforming our criminal justice system by reducing the number of people who are arrested and incarcerated will help make our communities safe.

39

People who want criminal justice reform are really just soft on crime and want more bad people roaming free in our communities.

30

# Majority of Independents Embrace Most Progressive Value Propositions

Figure 23

Progressive Propositions	Percent selecting 5-7 on a 7-point scale			
	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep
We should not have two standards of justice where rich people accused of crimes are allowed to stay at home prior to their court dates, while those who are poor must stay in jail for weeks or months simply because they cannot afford bail.	74	81	72	66
The war on drugs has failed - more drugs than ever are entering our communities and too many people have been locked up in prison and jail for long sentences.	64	76	62	54
Those with mental health disabilities or substance abuse problems should not be in prison, they must be provided treatment by health professionals.	63	75	57	53
(Split) Racial profiling of African Americans by police forces is a major problem in many communities, and we must take stronger steps to ensure fair treatment of all citizens	60	79	59	38
(Split) Racial profiling of African Americans by police forces is a major problem in many communities, and we must take stronger steps to ensure that police are held accountable for this type of misconduct.	57	79	52	37
Our country relies too much on criminalizing behavior to make communities safe. There are smarter, less expensive, and more humane ways to deal with many societal problems outside of the criminal justice system.	56	71	54	39
Overly long sentences and harsh conditions in many U.S. prisons and jails today go beyond justice, and unfairly take away the dignity of those serving time.	55	69	55	37
The criminal justice system - including police, lawyers, judges, and prisons - is systemically biased against African Americans and other people of color.	49	71	49	24
Reforming our criminal justice system by reducing the number of people who are arrested and incarcerated will help make our communities safe.	39	50	38	27

# Big Differences By Race On Progressive Value Propositions

Figure 24

## Progressive Propositions

*Percent selecting 5-7 on a 7-point scale*

	Total	White	Af Am	Latino
We should not have two standards of justice where rich people accused of crimes are allowed to stay at home prior to their court dates, while those who are poor must stay in jail for weeks or months simply because they cannot afford bail.	74	73	78	73
The war on drugs has failed - more drugs than ever are entering our communities and too many people have been locked up in prison and jail for long sentences.	64	63	78	66
Those with mental health disabilities or substance abuse problems should not be in prison, they must be provided treatment by health professionals.	63	62	72	64
(Split) Racial profiling of African Americans by police forces is a major problem in many communities, and we must take stronger steps to ensure fair treatment of all citizens	60	53	87	64
(Split) Racial profiling of African Americans by police forces is a major problem in many communities, and we must take stronger steps to ensure that police are held accountable for this type of misconduct.	57	52	80	72
Our country relies too much on criminalizing behavior to make communities safe. There are smarter, less expensive, and more humane ways to deal with many societal problems outside of the criminal justice system.	56	52	71	58
Overly long sentences and harsh conditions in many U.S. prisons and jails today go beyond justice, and unfairly take away the dignity of those serving time.	55	50	75	64
The criminal justice system - including police, lawyers, judges, and prisons - is systemically biased against African Americans and other people of color.	49	40	81	67
Reforming our criminal justice system by reducing the number of people who are arrested and incarcerated will help make our communities safe.	39	32	63	51

# Independents Closer to Democrats on Traditional Value Propositions

Figure 25

## Traditional Propositions

*Percent selecting 5-7 on a 7-point scale*

	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep
Police forces are doing their best in dangerous situations, and we should do more to support them and stop criticizing them	65	49	61	87
(Split) Undocumented immigrants and other minority groups commit disproportionately more crimes, and that is why these groups are more often targeted by law enforcement than others	46	32	42	66
Making communities safer is a straightforward issue - the more we spend on police, prosecutors, courts, and prisons, the safer our communities will be	46	43	34	62
(Split) Young African American men commit disproportionately more crimes, and that is why they are more often targeted by law enforcement than others	45	38	41	59
People who want criminal justice reform are really just soft on crime and want more bad people roaming free in our communities	30	24	25	43

# African Americans More Likely Than Whites To Agree With Most Traditional Value Propositions

Figure 26

## Traditional Propositions

*Percent selecting 5-7 on a 7-point scale*

	Total	White	Af Am	Latino
Police forces are doing their best in dangerous situations, and we should do more to support them and stop criticizing them	65	70	55	47
(Split) Undocumented immigrants and other minority groups commit disproportionately more crimes, and that is why these groups are more often targeted by law enforcement than others	46	45	51	43
Making communities safer is a straightforward issue - the more we spend on police, prosecutors, courts, and prisons, the safer our communities will be	46	45	57	42
(Split) Young African American men commit disproportionately more crimes, and that is why they are more often targeted by law enforcement than others	45	44	55	41
People who want criminal justice reform are really just soft on crime and want more bad people roaming free in our communities	30	27	40	31

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# **Attitudes Toward The Current System**

# Likelihood of Recidivism Underscores Failure Of Current System

Figure 28

## CJR Pairs

*Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.*

**(Statement A)** Individuals leaving prisons and jails today are more likely to commit another crime and return to prison.

**(Statement B)** Individuals leaving prisons and jails today are more likely to find a job and successfully re-enter society.

64

Total

23

69

White

18

48

Af Am

37

54

Latino

36

62

Democrat

26

63

Independent

21

69

Republican

21



# Current System Places Punishment Over Rehabilitation

Figure 29

## CJR Pairs

*Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.*

**(Statement A)** The primary purpose of our prisons and jails is to punish those who have committed crimes and make sure they face the consequences of their actions.

**(Statement B)** The primary purpose of our prisons and jails is to rehabilitate those convicted of crimes and ensure they can successfully re-enter society.

56

Total

37

58

White

35

50

Af Am

43

49

Latino

46

52

Democrat

40

55

Independent

36

60

Republican

34

# Significant Support for Belief In Potential For Personal Growth / Second Chances

Figure 30

## CJR Pairs

*Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.*

**(Statement B)** Most people convicted of crimes in our justice system are unlikely to change for the better, and they will likely continue a life of illegal behavior.

**(Statement A)** Most people convicted of crimes in our justice system are still capable of positive growth, and they have the potential to change for the better.

33

Total

59

35

White

58

28

Af Am

61

33

Latino

59

26

Democrat

68

34

Independent

56

42

Republican

50

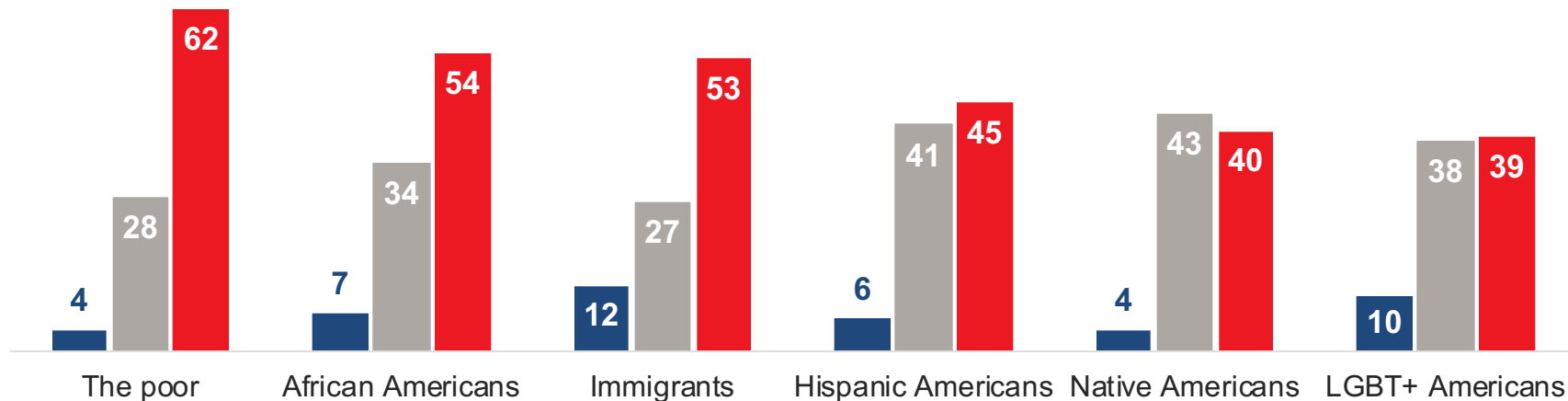
# Majorities Believe Poor, African Americans, And Immigrants Treated Unjustly

Figure 31

## System Treatment

*For each one, please indicate whether you believe that group is treated better, the same, or worse than other groups in the criminal justice system.*

- Better than
- Same as
- Worse than



# Large Partisan Differences, Smaller Racial Differences

Figure 32

## System Treatment

*For each one, please indicate whether you believe that group is treated the better, the same, or worse than other groups in the criminal justice system.*

<i>Net Better – Worse Treatment</i>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Dem</b>	<b>Ind</b>	<b>Rep</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Af Am</b>	<b>Latino</b>
The poor	<b>-58</b>	<b>-69</b>	<b>-61</b>	<b>-42</b>	<b>-58</b>	<b>-62</b>	<b>-49</b>
African Americans	-47	<b>-65</b>	-46	-26	-46	<b>-56</b>	-45
Immigrants	-41	<b>-68</b>	-39	-10	-36	-52	<b>-43</b>
Hispanic Americans	-39	<b>-56</b>	-39	-18	-38	-39	-40
Native Americans	-36	<b>-45</b>	-37	-23	-38	-33	-28
LGBT+ Americans	-29	<b>-49</b>	-26	-8	-30	-32	-24
The middle class	-2	+3	-1	<b>-8</b>	-2	-2	+7
Asian Americans	-3	-4	-3	-1	-6	+7	+3
White or Caucasian Americans	+37	+57	+32	+16	+33	+59	+39
The wealthy	+67	+72	+70	+58	+72	+55	+57



# **Messaging**

# Strongest Overall Messages Focus on Prevention, Appropriate Treatment

Figure 34

## CJR Positives

Mean on a 10-point scale

**(Prevention)** A focus on prevention in health care helps to reduce costs and keep people healthier by focusing on problems before people get too sick. A similar focus on prevention in public safety would help to cut the high costs of incarceration while reducing crime in our communities by investing in good schools, affordable housing, job training, and drug or mental health treatment for those who need it.

Mean

6.7

**(Appropriate Treatment)** Too often, police are asked to respond to incidents involving people with severe mental health challenges, drug addiction, or other medical issues they are not trained to deal with effectively, and the consequences are sometimes deadly. We should give EMTs, mental health professionals, and drug counselors more first responder responsibilities and resources so that they can respond directly to emergencies that require their skills instead of a police response.

6.7

**(Drugs/Rural)** (Split) Prescription drug abuse and opioid abuse are major public health problems that are tearing apart small towns and rural areas across our country and can only be solved by prevention, education, treatment and rehabilitation. Treating this as a criminal issue instead of a public health issue makes the situation worse and prevents people with drug problems from getting the help they need.

6.6

**(Drugs/Urban)** (Split) Drug abuse is a major public health problem that is tearing apart urban areas and inner-city neighborhoods across our country and can only be solved by prevention, education, treatment and rehabilitation. Treating this as a criminal issue instead of a public health issue makes the situation worse and prevents people with drug problems from getting the help they need.

6.6

# Alternative Investments, Cycle of Poverty Messages Also Stand Out, Especially Among CJR Supporters

Figure 35

## CJR Positives

Mean on a 10-point scale

**(\$80B/Alternative Investments)** (Split) The U.S. imprisons a higher percentage of its population than any other country in the world, but it doesn't make us safer. We are spending 80 billion every year on prisons and jails - money that could be better spent on education, drug and mental health treatment, and other investments that are proven to reduce crime and make communities safer.

Mean

6.6

**(Cycle of Poverty)** Our criminal justice system traps individuals and communities in a cycle of poverty, as a single criminal conviction can make it nearly impossible to get a job, further education, or housing. One of the best ways to fight poverty is by reforming our criminal justice system.

6.4

**(Reduce Police Footprint)** We have relied too heavily on law enforcement to keep communities safe at the expense of crime prevention and community-based solutions. We need to reduce the footprint of policing and the criminal justice system and find other ways to solve societal problems.

5.7

**(\$80B/Low Crime Rates)** (Split) National crime rates are near historic lows, yet we're continuing to spend \$80 billion every year on overcrowded prisons and jails.

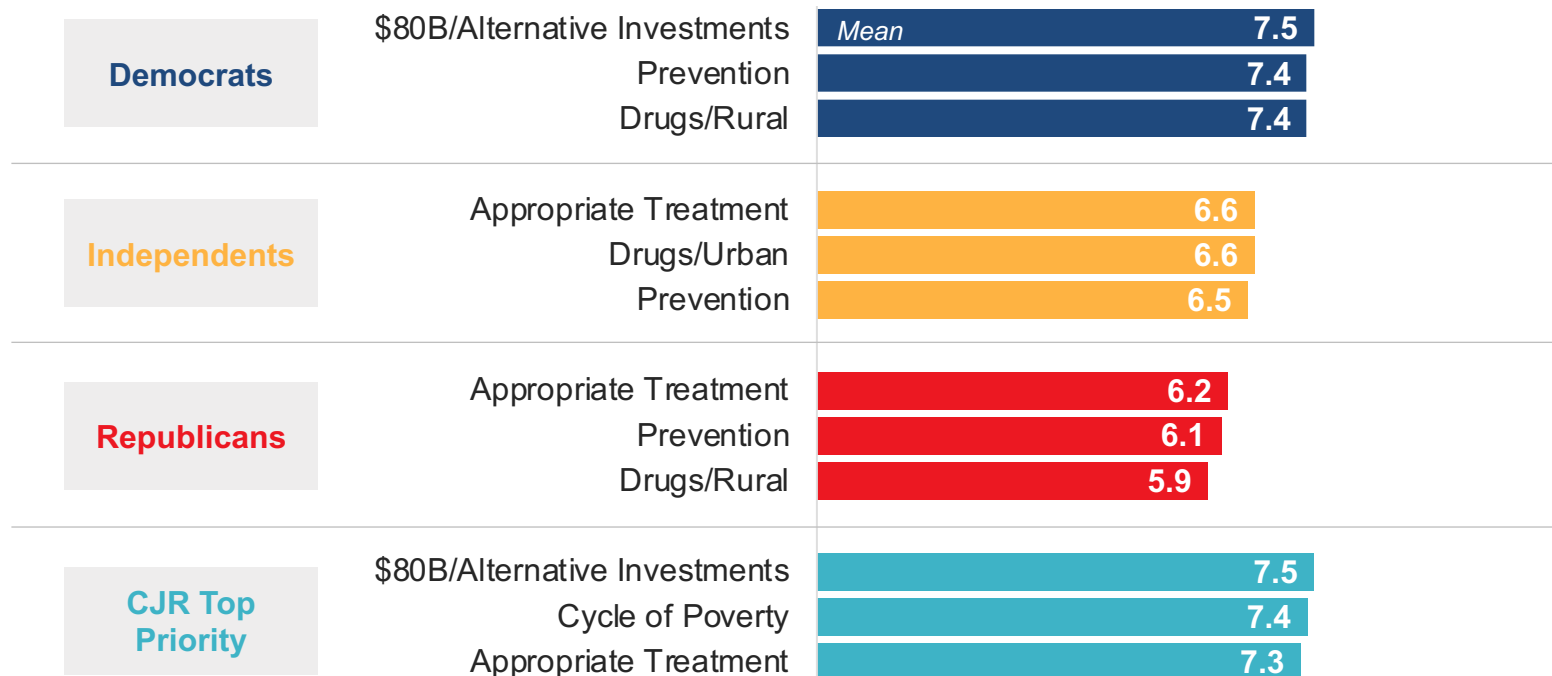
5.7

# Prevention Strong Across Party Lines, Alternative Investments Resonates With Base Audiences

Figure 36

## CJR Positives

Mean on a 10-point scale



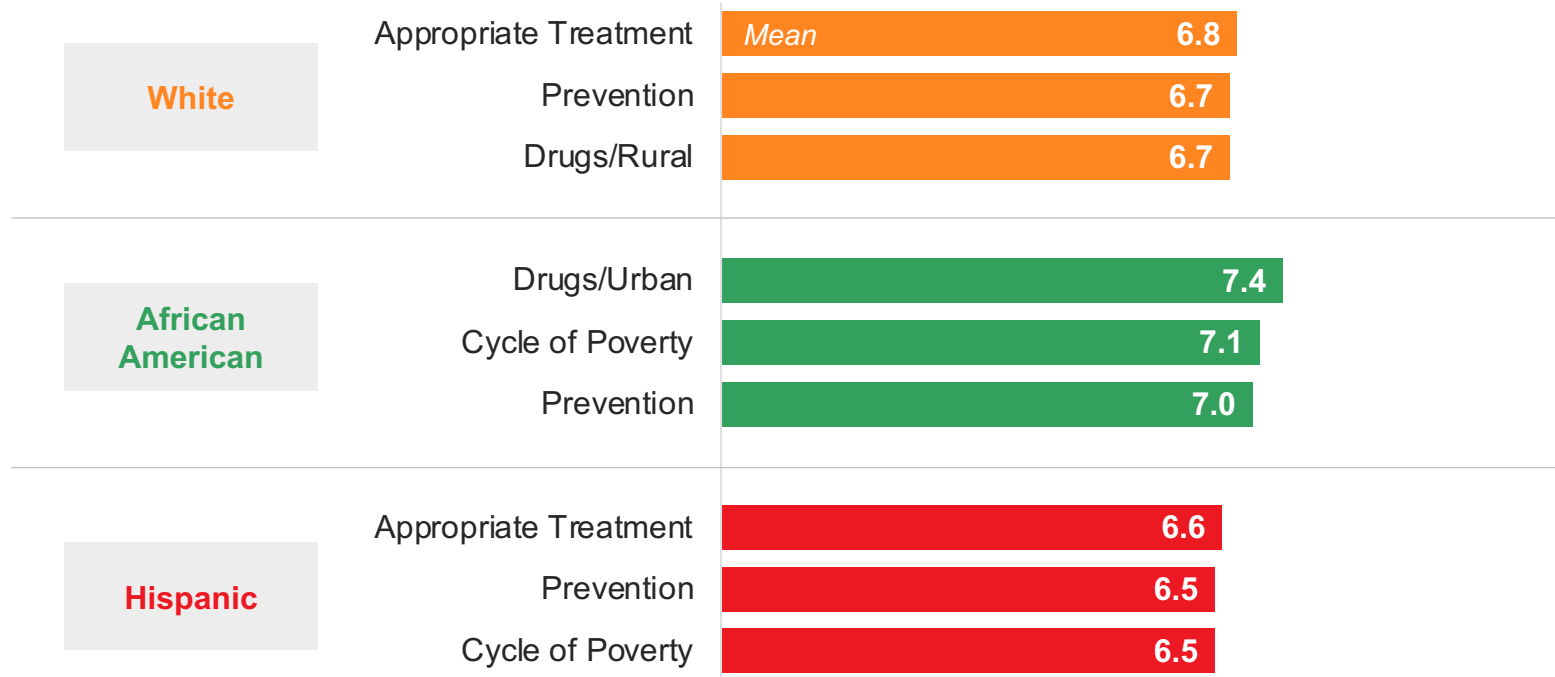


# Prevention Strong Across Racial Lines, Cycle of Poverty Resonates With Racial Minorities

Figure 37

## CJR Positives

Mean on a 10-point scale



# Helping Those With A Substance Abuse Problem and Mental Health Issues Is the Best Reason To Reform the System

Figure 38

## Criminal Justice Reforms

*Which TWO of the following do you feel are the best reasons to support criminal justice reform in the U.S.?*

		Dem	Ind	Rep
It will help more people with substance abuse and mental health problems get the help they need	42	41	43	44
It will give more people in prisons and jails a second chance and help them successfully re-enter society	37	35	38	37
It will shift the focus of our prison system from punishment to rehabilitation	32	35	36	24
It will save taxpayers money	27	25	29	29
It will reduce racial and economic inequalities in our criminal justice system	26	36	21	19
It will make our local communities safer	21	20	17	27
None of the above	7	4	8	10

# White Voters Focused On Substance Abuse And Mental Health While Racial Minorities And CJR Voters Prioritize Second Chances

Figure 39

	White	African American	Hispanic	CJR Top Priority
It will help more people with substance abuse and mental health problems get the help they need	46	36	33	38
It will give more people in prisons and jails a second chance and help them successfully re-enter society	36	43	39	44
It will shift the focus of our prison system from punishment to rehabilitation	33	26	31	30
It will save taxpayers money	26	32	28	27
It will reduce racial and economic inequalities in our criminal justice system	23	33	34	35
It will make our local communities safer	21	23	21	20

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