



**CRIME
&
PUNISHMENT
2015**

POSSEPLUS RETREAT

**2015
PPR
REPORT**



The Posse Foundation

Five Program Components

1. Recruitment

From September to December each year, Posse conducts the Dynamic Assessment Process (DAP), a unique evaluation method designed to identify young leaders who might be missed by traditional admissions criteria, but who can excel at selective colleges and universities. Using nontraditional forums to evaluate potential, DAP offers students an opportunity to demonstrate their intrinsic leadership abilities, their skill at working in a team setting, and their motivation and desire to succeed. DAP has proven to be an extremely effective tool for identifying outstanding young leaders. In a three-part process, including large group and individual interviews, Posse staff and partner college and university administrators ultimately select a diverse group of 10 students for each college or university, thus forming a Posse.

2. Pre-Collegiate Training

From January to August of their senior year in high school, Posse Scholars meet weekly with staff trainers and their Posse peers for two-hour workshops. The Pre-Collegiate Training Program consists of workshops that address four areas: 1) team building and group support, 2) cross-cultural communication, 3) leadership and becoming an active agent of change on campus, and 4) academic excellence. The goal of the training is to prepare Scholars for leadership roles on campus and for the high-level academic expectations of their colleges.

3. Campus Program

The Campus Program works to ensure the retention of Posse Scholars and to increase the impact of Posse on campus. Posse staff members visit each college and university four times a year for meetings with Posse Scholars, campus liaisons and mentors. During a Posse's first two years on campus, Scholars meet with their mentor each week as a group and every other week individually. In addition, Posse facilitates an annual weekend-long PossePlus Retreat attended by members of the larger student body, faculty and administration with the goal of discussing an important campus issue identified by Posse Scholars.

4. Career Program

The Career Program supports Posse Scholars as they transition from being leaders on campus to becoming leaders in the workforce. Posse plays an integral role in the professional development of these young people by providing them with the tools and opportunities necessary to secure highly competitive, career-enhancing internships and jobs. One of the ways Posse achieves this is by partnering with exceptional companies and organizations, both nationally and abroad. The Career Program has three core components: 1) Internship Program, 2) Career Services and 3) The Alumni Network.

5. Posse Access

Posse Access is an online database designed to give Posse partner colleges and universities exclusive access to unselected student nominees to consider for regular admission. Through Posse Access, the hundreds of finalists nationwide who are not selected can opt to have their application profiles made available to each of Posse's partner institutions. By identifying candidates through the Posse Access database, partner schools benefit from Posse's holistic approach to evaluating student potential and see a much greater pool of highly qualified students.



CRIME & PUNISHMENT

2015 POSSEPLUS RETREAT

Each year, The Posse Foundation facilitates a series of three-day weekend retreats—called PossePlus Retreats (PPRs)—for the campus communities of its partner colleges and universities. Designed to bring together Posse Scholars, non-Posse students and members of the faculty and administration, PPRs provide an opportunity to explore a socially relevant topic through various workshops and other activities.

In total, more than 4,500 participants from 47 of Posse's partner schools—including over 4,000 students and more than 400 faculty members and administrators—came together to discuss the 2015 PPR topic of crime and punishment in today's society.

Crime + Punishment in the United States

The recent surge in media coverage of violent, often deadly encounters between the police and people of color—much of it captured on smartphones and dash cams—has sparked a nationwide debate about the dynamics of race and justice in America. From the Black Lives Matter movement to counter-movements such as All Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter, the issue has provoked strong reactions and wildly differing viewpoints. The volatility of the debate underscores longstanding differences in the ways different communities experience and perceive the justice system.

Like the country at large, college students are engaged in this discussion. Students' views on crime and punishment in America are greatly influenced by their personal experiences, their identities and their opinions of what they see taking place in society.



Summary of Survey Findings

At the start of the 2015 PPR, attendees completed an anonymous survey created by The Posse Institute—the research department of The Posse Foundation. The survey revealed that among students:

- 80 percent do not believe that the United States justice system is fair.
- 95 percent think there is bias in the United States justice system.
- 89 percent think the main purpose of prison should be rehabilitation.
- 91 percent believe that the United States incarcerates too many people.
- Over 65 percent believe that there is some part of their identity that keeps them safe or unsafe from criminal suspicion, most notably, being of a particular race.

More than half of the students surveyed self-identified as either black, non-white Latino, or multi-racial. In addition, all of the students surveyed are Millennials, born in the late-1990s or the early 2000s.

The findings from the 2015 PPR survey suggest that many students at elite colleges hold a dismal view of crime and punishment in America. This report explores these findings in greater detail.



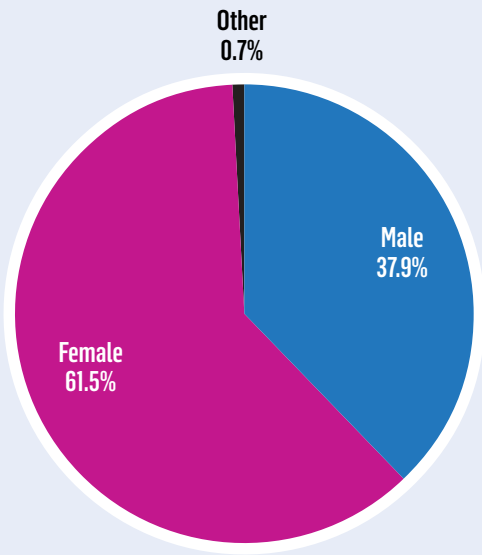
Demographic data describing the student respondents is as follows.

Average Age: 19.8 years
Born in the United States: 79.6%

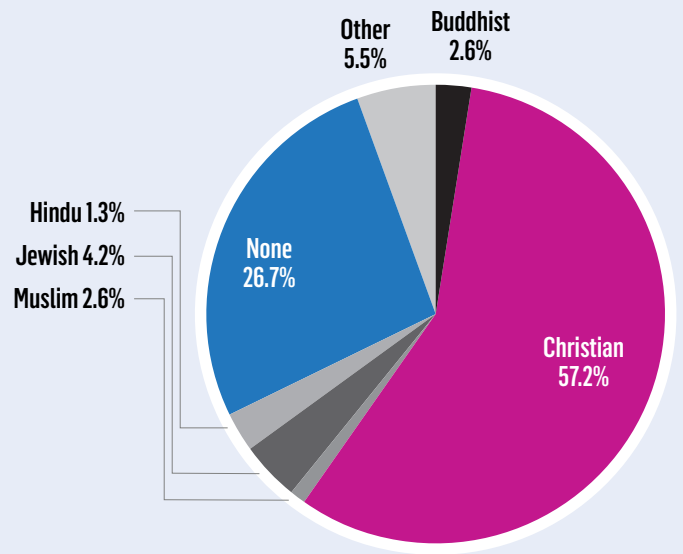


Group Characteristics

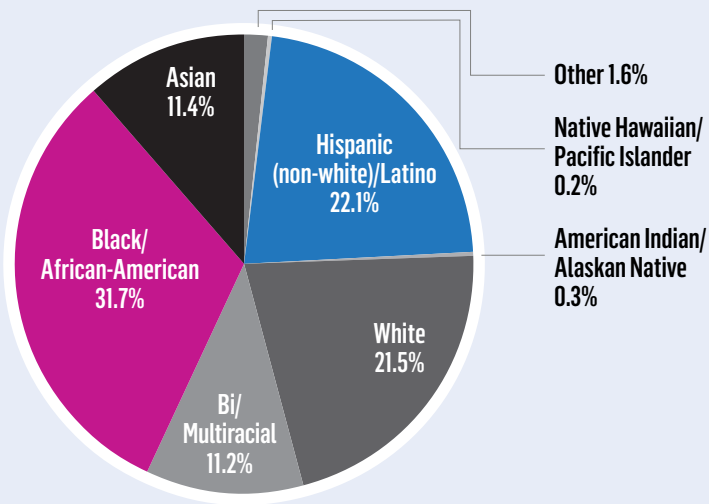
Sex



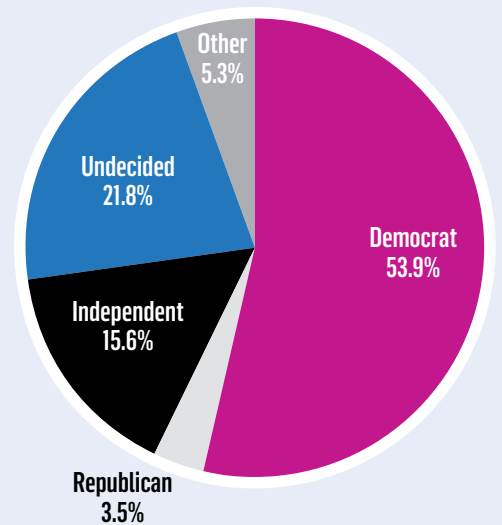
Religion



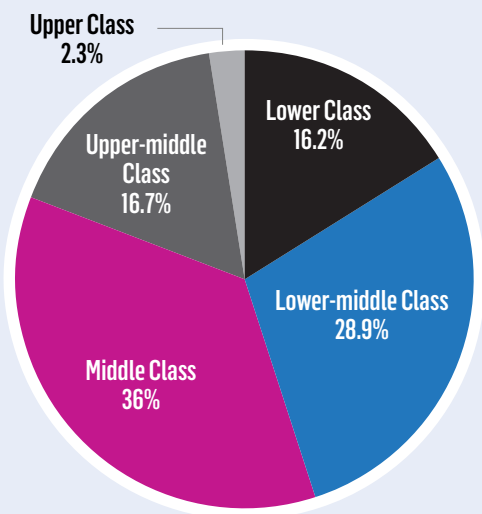
Race



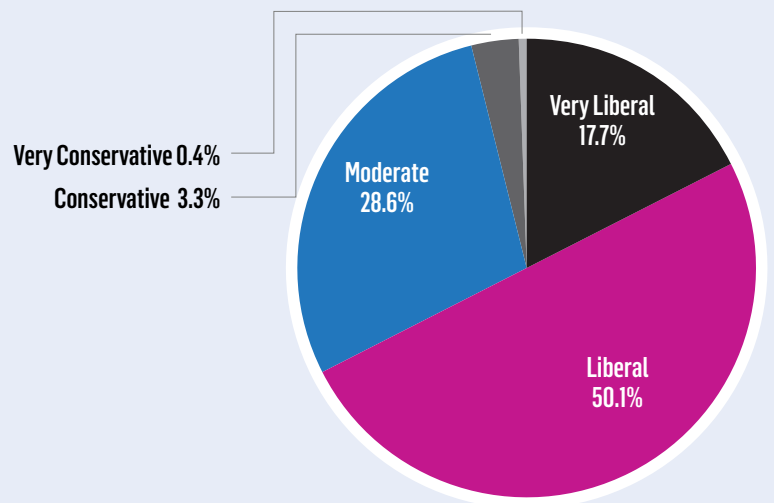
Political Affiliation



Socioeconomic Class



Political Philosophy



Retreat Context

The following statement was delivered by retreat facilitators to provide context for the retreat:

Issues related to crime and punishment are embedded in the fabric of our society. In the past year, debates on this topic have been heightened to a fever pitch as story after story comes out about people, everyday people, who live in this country but are encountering different versions of the justice system. While the focus recently has been on racial profiling and use of force by police—think about the protests in Ferguson, Eric Garner, "I Can't Breathe," and the assassination of NYPD Officers Liu and Ramos—many events related to American crime and punishment have been a consistent part of the news. Coverage has included stories about unaccompanied minors crossing the border, executive action on illegal immigration, domestic abuse involving individuals in the NFL, legalization of marijuana, privacy and Homeland Security, Stop-and-frisk, broken windows policing, white-collar crime, big banks and mortgage fraud, and the prison-industrial complex, just to name a few. And as these issues course in and out of the 24-hour news cycle and social media feeds, the daily churn of the criminal justice system continues:

crimes are committed, victims' lives are forever changed, people are arrested and charged, juries decide the fates of the accused, and prisoners wake up to another day behind bars. To give you a sense of the scope of this system, the prison population in this country is over two million and the United States now has more jails and prisons than degree-granting colleges.^{1,2}

All of this raises critical questions about the criminal justice system. In 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote from his jail cell in Birmingham, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Is justice real to you, or does it exist only as an ideal? What is fair? Who deserves to be punished? Who deserves to be protected? Who is safe and who is in danger? Who is policed? Who is not policed? Who gets away? Who is behind bars? Who is in charge of the system? Who defines crime? Is everyone treated equally under the law? Does our system make sense? Is there a different version of criminal justice that we want to see? What constitutes your moral compass? What has been your experience?



College + University Partner Retreat Participants

Agnes Scott College
Babson College
Bard College
Boston University
Brandeis University
Bryn Mawr College
Bucknell University
Carleton College
Centre College
Colby College
The College of Wooster
Connecticut College
Cornell University
Denison University
DePauw University
Dickinson College
Franklin & Marshall College
Grinnell College
Hamilton College
Hobart and William Smith Colleges
Kalamazoo College
Lafayette College
Lawrence University
Middlebury College
Mount Holyoke College
Northwestern University
Oberlin College
Pepperdine University
Pomona College
Sewanee: The University of the South
Syracuse University
St. Olaf College
Texas A&M University
Trinity College
Tulane University
Union College
University of California, Berkeley
University of California, Los Angeles
University of Pennsylvania
University of Rochester
University of Texas at Austin
University of Virginia
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Vanderbilt University
Vassar College
Wesleyan University
Wheaton College

The Criminal Justice System: Unfair, Ineffective + Overactive

Most students (74 percent) consider themselves at least “somewhat knowledgeable” about the criminal justice system in the United States. They report that this knowledge comes mostly from school and media/news outlets (see Chart 1). The majority of students—80 percent—do not agree with the statement, “our justice system is generally fair,” and an even higher percentage do not believe that the prison system or the court system in the United States is generally fair. In fact, “unfair” was a frequent response when students listed words that came to mind when thinking about the United States justice system. The following sections examine what students think of the various components of the United States’ justice system and the reasons they believe it is flawed.

80% of students surveyed do not believe the current justice system in the United States is fair.

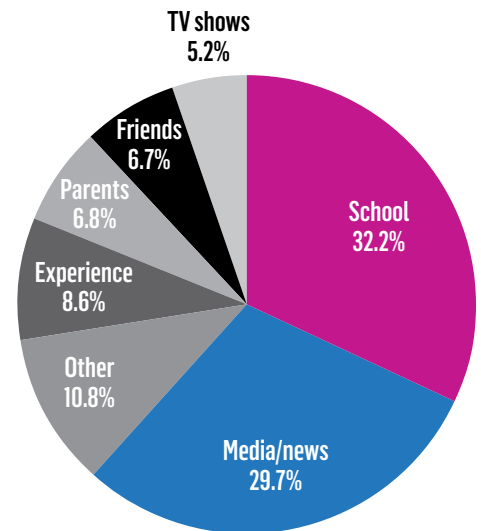


The Prison System

Student assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the United States prison system mostly referenced weaknesses. Most responses indicated the presence of racism and discrimination throughout the prison system and expressed in their qualitative responses that the system seems to be designed in a way that keeps people of color, especially blacks and Latinos, incarcerated with little opportunity for rehabilitation. Respondents also expressed a desire for prison reform, wanting the United States to move towards a model that focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders.

Criticism of the privatization of prisons was common in the qualitative responses, with students expressing that prisons are operated like businesses with the primary motive of producing gains through cheap prisoner labor. Only 14 percent of students indicated that for-profit prisons should even be legal. And while approximately half of students think it is okay for private investors to contract prisoners for work, many more (85 percent) believe that prisoners should have the right to opt-in or opt-out of this work and 81 percent believe that prisoners should be paid for their service.

Chart 1 – Most of my knowledge of the criminal justice system comes from:



Only 14% of students think for-profit prisons should be legal.

Today, in contract with the federal government, 13 private prison facilities house approximately 12 percent of all federal detainees—about 22,660 prisoners.^{3,4} A much larger portion of the private prison population, an estimated 94,000 prisoners, is comprised of state prisoners.^{3,5} A 2016 memo from Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates announced a move away from government use of private prisons for federal prisoners. The memo described the federal government’s efforts to reduce the number of federal prisoners in private prisons and eventually end the use of privately run prisons altogether, claiming that they are less safe and less effective than government-run prisons.⁶



Students also expressed their dismay over the percentage of the American population currently jailed in the United States. The vast majority (91 percent) believe the United States incarcerates too many people. Most students correctly guessed the rank of the United States as the country with the highest percentage of its population in prison when compared with Brazil, China, India, Mexico and Sweden. With a prison population of over two million (a rate of 693 per 100,000 people), the United States has the largest prison population compared to all other countries tracked in the Institute for Criminal Policy Research's World Prison Brief.¹

Almost all students (91%) believe the United States incarcerates too many people.

In addition to believing that too many people in the United States are incarcerated, most students also believe that the current system is failing to do its job. Only 39 percent believe that the United States criminal justice system is generally effective, and only 30 percent think the current structure of incarcerating people keeps Americans safe. Student comments suggested that only the most violent criminals should be incarcerated.

Student perceptions of the United States prison system:

“Deeply flawed, intrinsically racist and systematically broken.”

“It unfairly prosecutes a large number of people of color.”

“I think it’s overpopulated and is a holding place for individuals that need help and not a place where people can get help and recover. I think privatization of prisons has made it a business.”

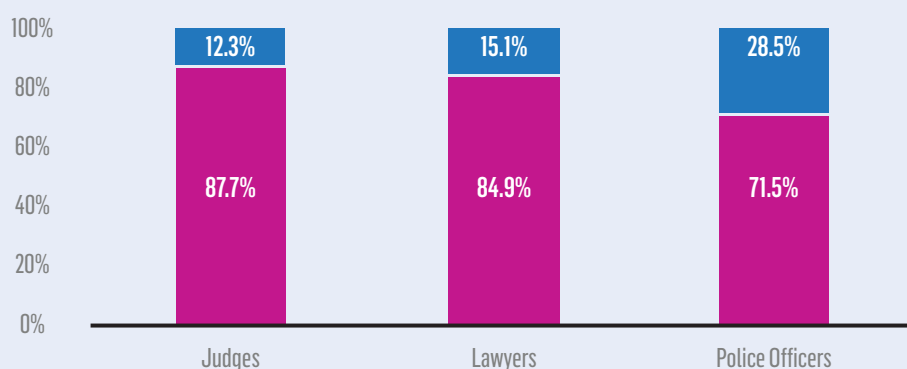
“It appears to be fair which makes everyone think there is nothing wrong, but there are serious structural issues that go unaddressed. It is an outdated system.”

“It does a better job than many countries, but it has many flaws.”

“It primarily does its job, however, there are major flaws within the system.”

Chart 2 – In general, do you have respect for:

■ Yes ■ No



The Police + Law Enforcement

Although most students find today's system of criminal justice to be unfair and ineffective, they do generally respect law enforcement officials (see Chart 2). Most students say they were taught to be respectful, cooperative and polite towards the police—conduct that a majority report they still follow today. (A minority of students shared that they were taught to be afraid and distrustful of police and/or to avoid police.)

Despite this outward show of respect, students' perceptions of the police are generally unfavorable. The presence of police makes only 10 percent of students feel safe and makes 53 percent of students feel uneasy (see Chart 3). When looking at the responses by race, over 50 percent of all racial groups said they felt uneasy. Sixty percent of students disagree with the statements, "I generally feel safer because of the police" and "I generally trust law enforcement." For these statements, the responses varied by race. The majority of Asian and white students (64 and 59 percent) agreed with the statements while the majority of black (78 percent), multiracial (63 percent), Latino (64 percent) and other minorities (50-73 percent) did not. Nevertheless, 83 percent think police today are "getting a bad rap" (see Charts 4-5).

Chart 3 – In general, the presence of police makes me feel:

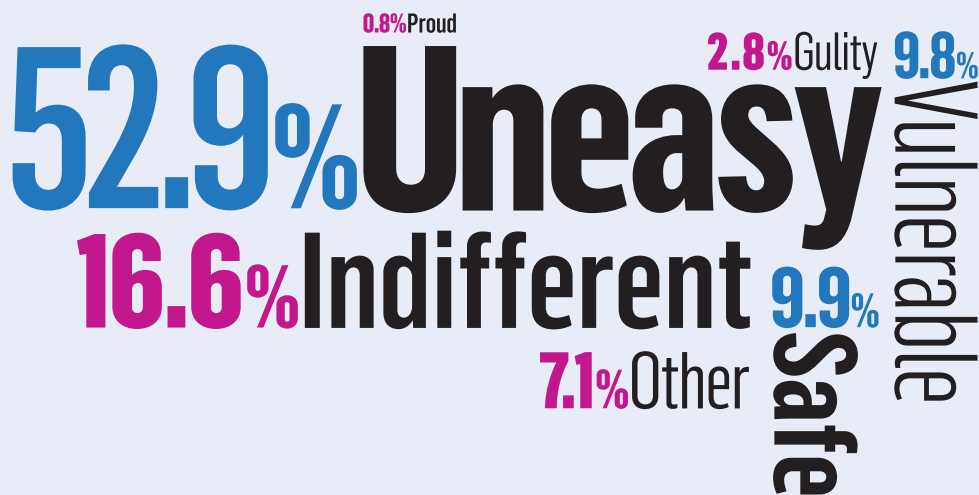


Chart 4 – Is your perception of the police generally favorable or unfavorable?

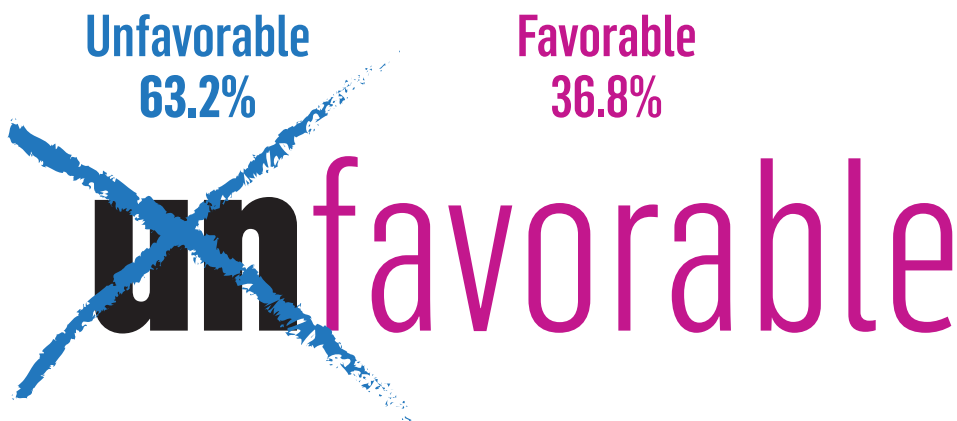
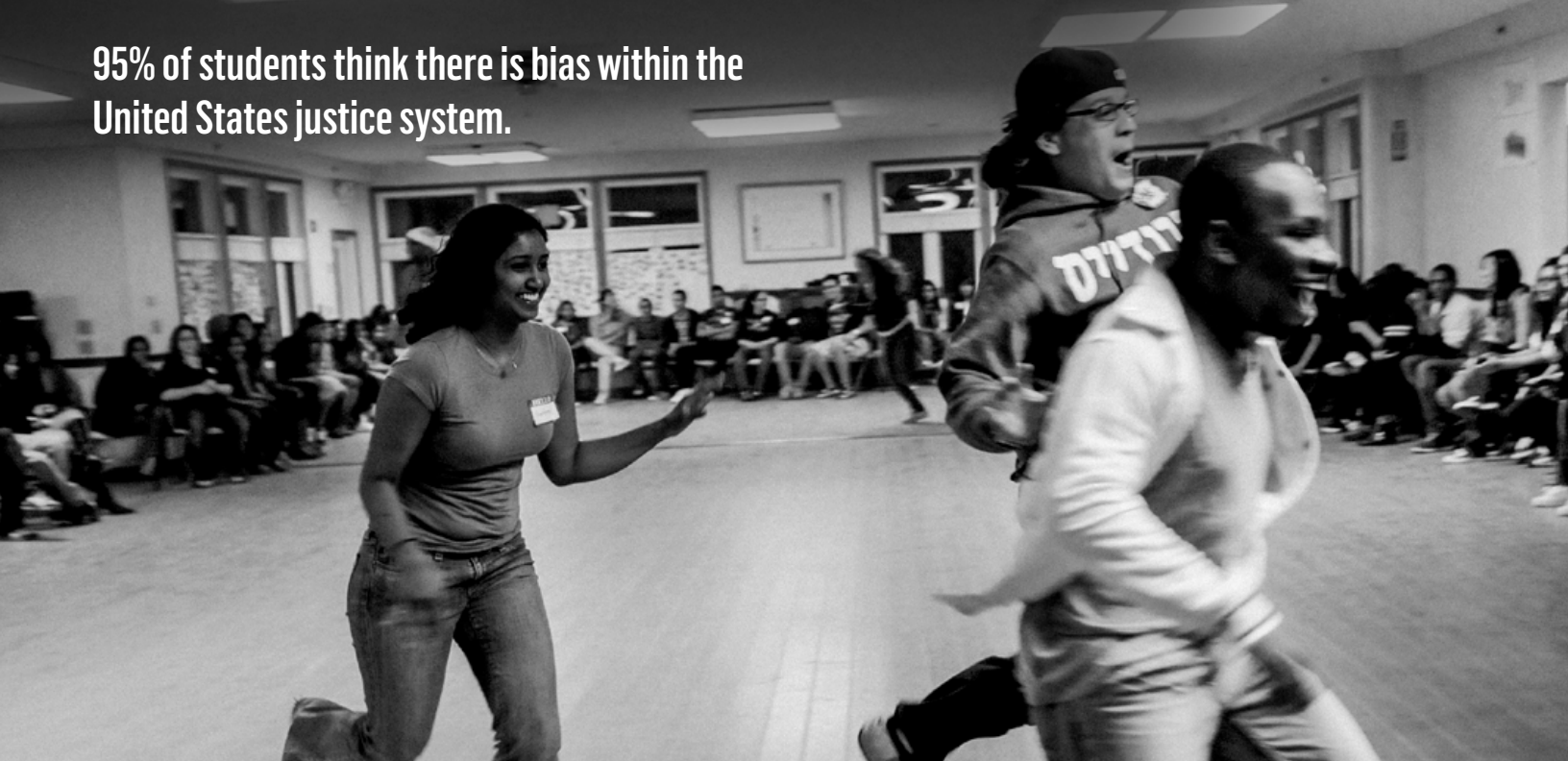


Chart 5 – Do you think police are getting a bad rap in today's climate?



95% of students think there is bias within the United States justice system.



Profiling + Bias

Almost all students surveyed think there is bias in the United States justice system and most say that there is at least some socioeconomic discrimination in the prison, court and college campus judicial systems (see Chart 6). Over 90 percent believe there is a correlation between income inequality and crime, and when asked to choose which group among poor people, middle-class people, or wealthy people is most likely to be suspected of a crime or accused of a crime, 97 percent of students selected poor people. Additionally, while half of students believe that “poor people and rich people are equally likely to commit a crime,” the majority also felt that poor people were the most likely socioeconomic group to be caught, arrested, convicted and incarcerated for a crime.

Racism is prevalent in the United States criminal justice system according to 96% of students.

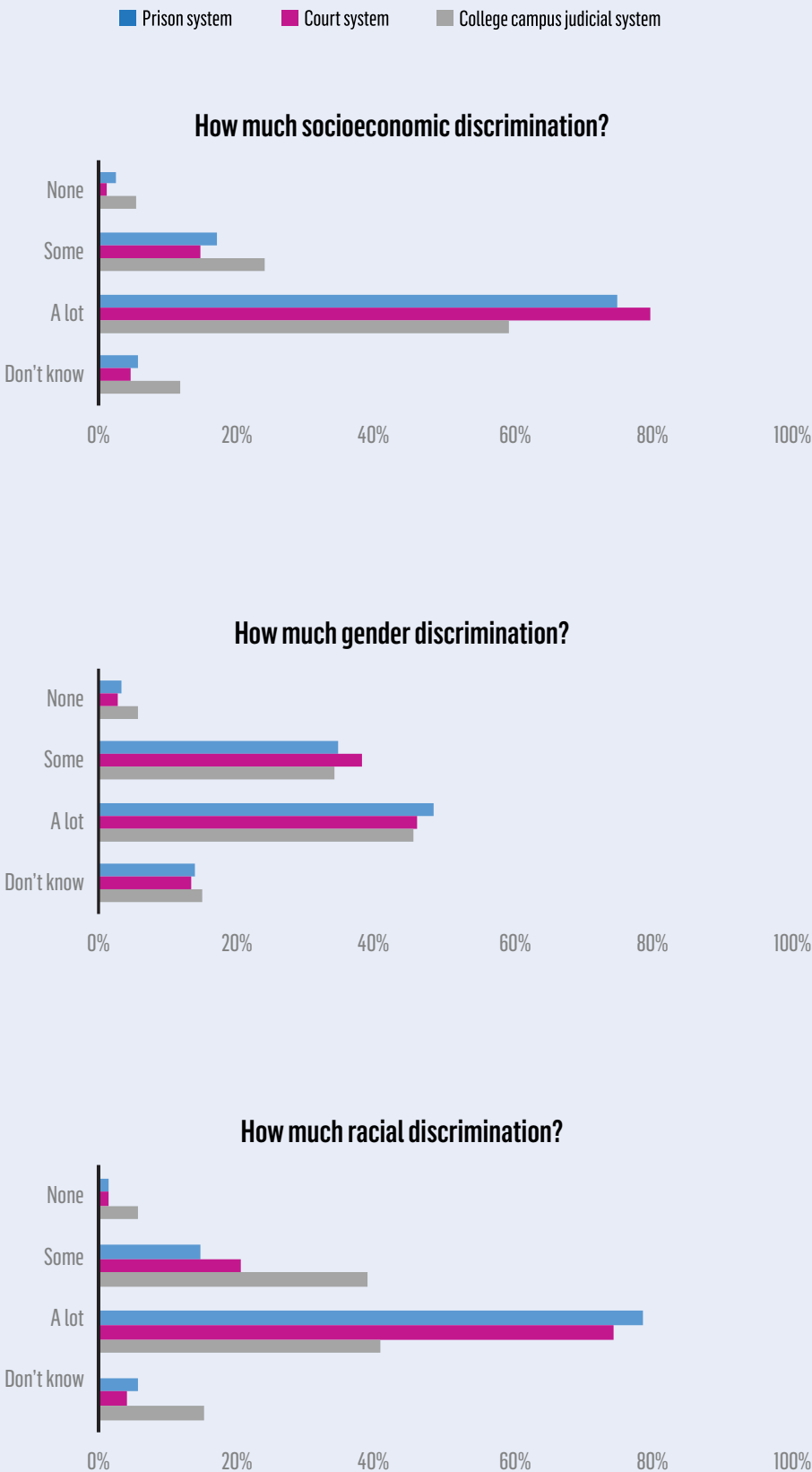
According to students, there is room for improvement in how the criminal justice system deals with crimes that are often associated with people from different socioeconomic classes. Seventy-eight percent feel the courts deal too harshly with petty-crime criminals and 79 percent believe that United States’ courts do not deal harshly enough with white-collar criminals. Most students (71 percent) believe that corporate crimes in particular are prosecuted inadequately. Sixty-four percent of students go as far to indicate that life without parole sentences are sometimes appropriate for white collar/corporate crimes, with an additional 10 percent believing life without parole sentences are always appropriate for these crimes.

In addition to socioeconomic bias, according to the vast majority (96 percent), racism is prevalent in the United States’ criminal justice system. At the time of the survey, racism in particular had been tied to cases of reported police brutality covered in the news. Of students surveyed, more than three-quarters believe that police brutality is a very large issue in this country. The killings of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Freddie Gray, for example, sparked significant protests and movements. These national and campus-wide protests, which include the “I Can’t Breathe” and the “Black Lives Matter” movements, linked police brutality to racism, and demanded accountability of the police officers involved.

98% of students believe some people have an easier time getting out of legal trouble than others.

The PPR survey gathered students’ opinions about the controversial killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York. The cases of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager fatally shot by a white police officer who suspected him of robbing a convenience store, and Eric Garner, a black man who died after being put in a chokehold by a white police officer while trying to arrest him for suspicion of selling loose cigarettes, led to national outrage and debate over racial profiling and police brutality among black Americans. Both officers were ultimately not indicted for either death. Of the students surveyed, an overwhelming majority believe that the officers involved should have been brought to trial for the deaths of these men: 94 percent in the case of Michael Brown and 98 percent in the case of Eric Garner.

Chart 6 – Students' ratings of the amount of specific types of discrimination within the prison, court, and college campus judicial systems:



71% of students think corporate crimes are not adequately prosecuted.



80% of students say they have been racially profiled.

Based on student responses to questions about their personal experiences, racial profiling is a common experience among this group. While only 9 percent feel that it is ever reasonable to racially profile, 76 percent have racially profiled someone themselves and 80 percent have themselves been profiled. It is therefore not surprising that 66 percent of students believe there is an aspect of their identity that makes them more prone to criminal suspicion. When asked which specific part of their identity made them susceptible to such attention, most answers centered around race. This matched the responses made by faculty and administrators. Larger percentages of those identifying with minority racial groups said that a part of their identity makes them prone to criminal suspicion—92 percent of black/African-American, 79 percent of Hispanic (non-white)/Latino, and 71 percent of bi/multiracial respondents, compared to 30 percent of white and 40 percent of Asian respondents (see Chart 7). Students felt being male, having an accent, being a member of the LGBTQ community, being young and being of a lower socioeconomic background also inspired bias among law enforcement.

Is there any part of your own identity that you believe makes you more prone to criminal suspicion?

Students:

“Being a Latino male from a low socioeconomic neighborhood.”

Hispanic/Latino, male, age 19

“I’m black and not like the race of people in my college town.”

Black, female, age 19

“I’m black. Everyone thinks blacks are criminals.”

Black, female, age 18

“I’m inclined to be of anti-establishment beliefs”

American Indian/Alaskan Native, male, age 21

“I’m young and I have an “urban” style.”

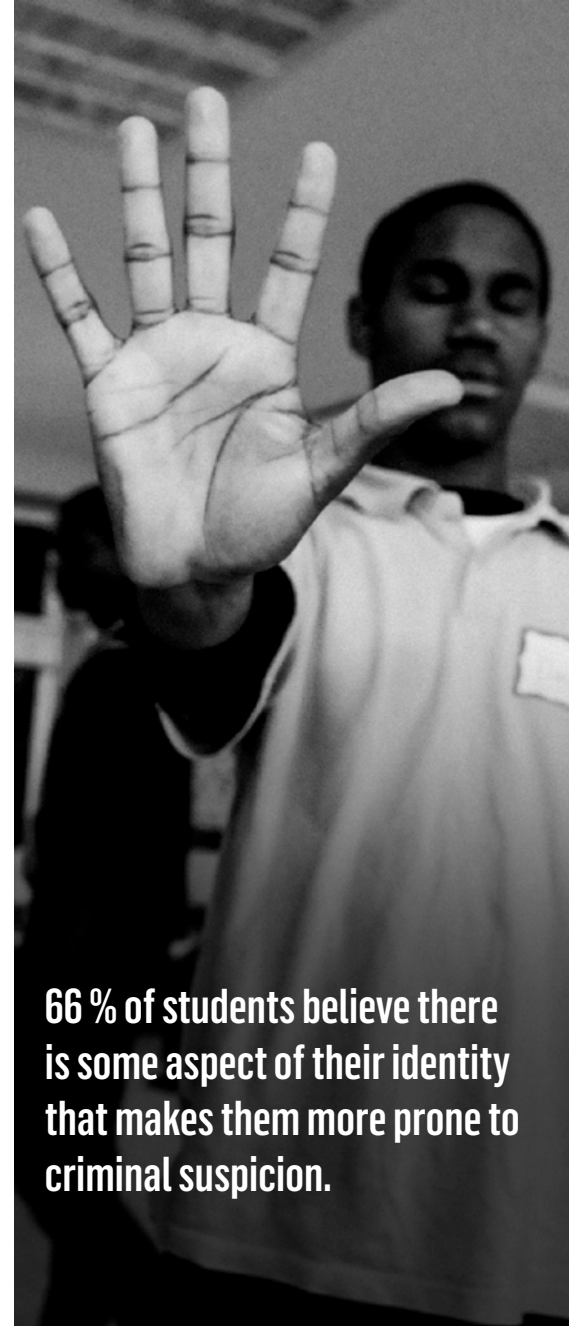
White, male, age 20

“I am prone to more TSA checks because I am Indian.”

Asian, male, age 19

“Being Latino, being queer, dressing/acting in “feminine” ways.”

Hispanic/Latino, male, age 18



66% of students believe there is some aspect of their identity that makes them more prone to criminal suspicion.

Faculty/Administrators:

“Dark skin in a white state.”

Bi/Multiracial, female, age 46

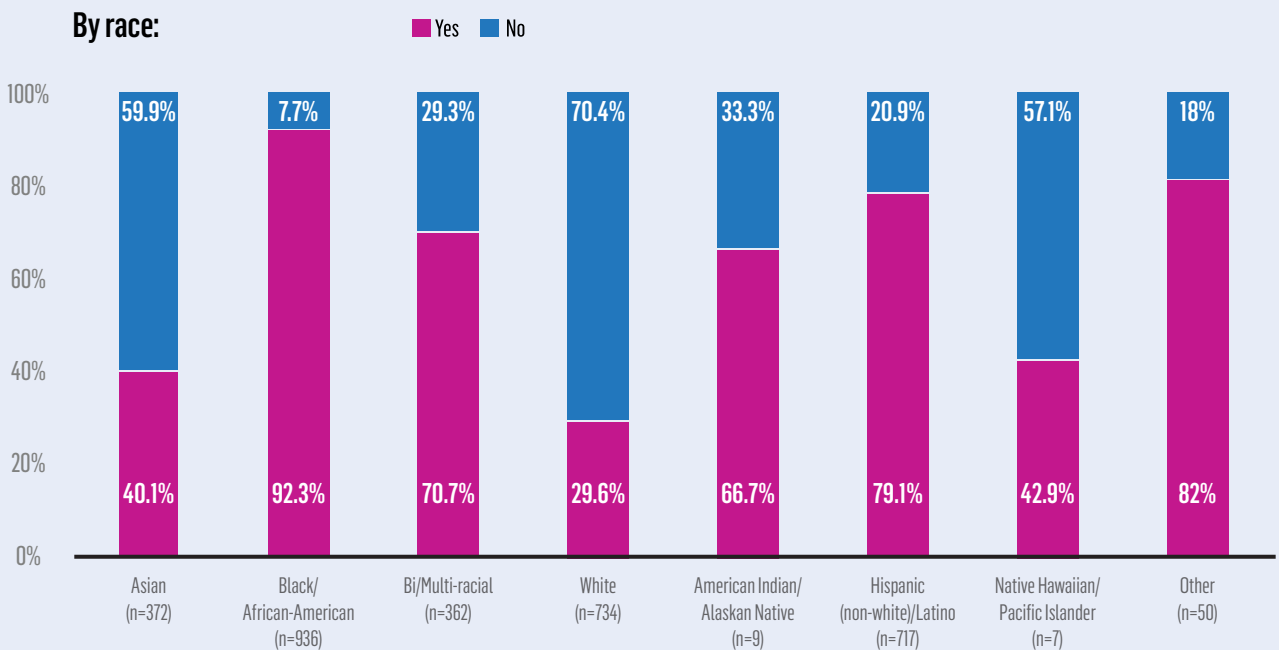
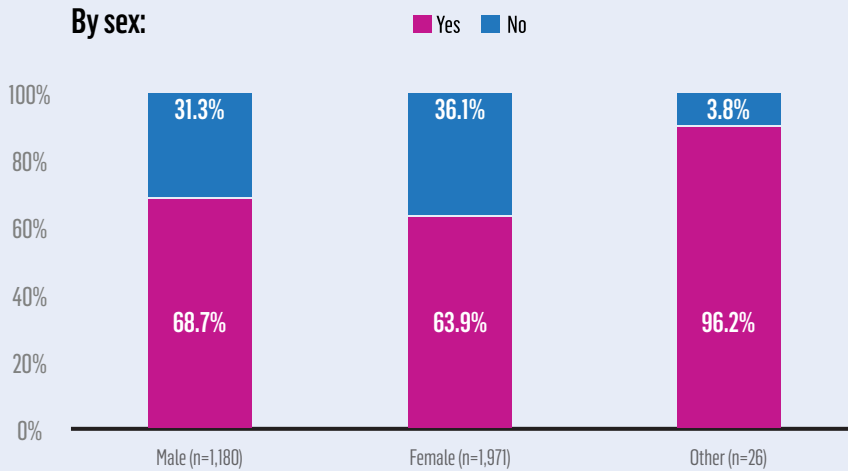
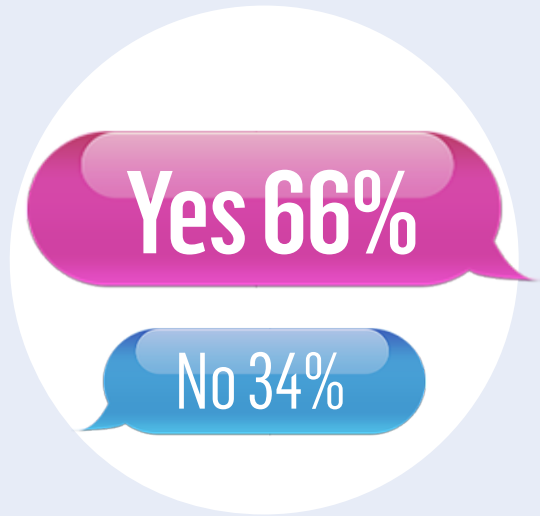
“The Mexican half of me. My Hispanic features.”

Hispanic/Latino, female, age 21

“African-American male.”

Black, male, age 51

Chart 7 – Is there any part of your own identity that you believe makes you **more prone** to criminal suspicion?





When students were asked the reverse question, “Is there any part of your own identity that you believe helps keep you safe from criminal suspicion,” 69 percent said yes. These responses most frequently pointed to being female or white. Seventy-five percent of female respondents and 91 percent of white respondents believe there is some part of their identity that keeps them safe from criminal suspicion, while fewer males (60 percent) and racial minorities (55 to 72 percent) feel the same (see Chart 8). Faculty and administrators who responded to this question also frequently shared that being white was what kept them safe from suspicion. Other notable student responses cited being a college student, citizenship status, religious affiliation, clothing choices, physical attractiveness and high socioeconomic status.

Is there any part of your own identity that you believe helps keep you safe from criminal suspicion?

Students:

“A small Asian girl is easily trusted.”

Asian, female, age 19

“I think that because I am a white female, people don't think I am likely to commit a crime.”

White, female, age 20

“I'm a light-skinned black girl and depending on how I wear my hair I look more 'white'.”

Bi/ Multiracial, female, age 21

“Inherently, being Caucasian probably does make me safer from profiling.”

White, male, age 19

“My father is white and I am wealthy.”

Bi/ Multiracial, male, age 22

“Yes, I'm fair-skinned even though I'm Latino. It helps me to not get profiled.”

Hispanic/Latino, male, age 20



Faculty/Administrators:

“Age: I'm 63.”

White, female, age 63

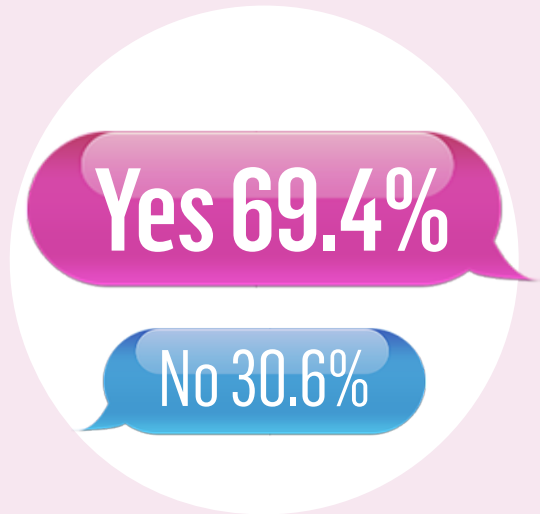
“I am white and I think unfortunately that makes a difference.”

White, female, age 35

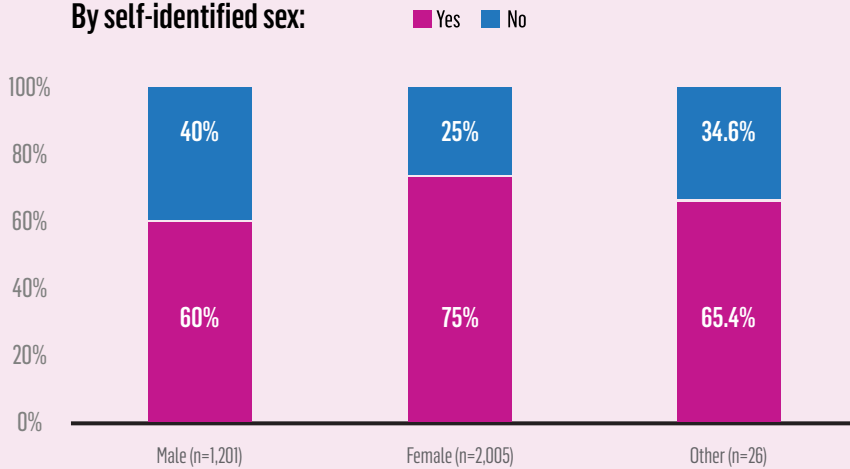
“Wearing a tie, being a middle-aged white guy.”

White, male, age 44

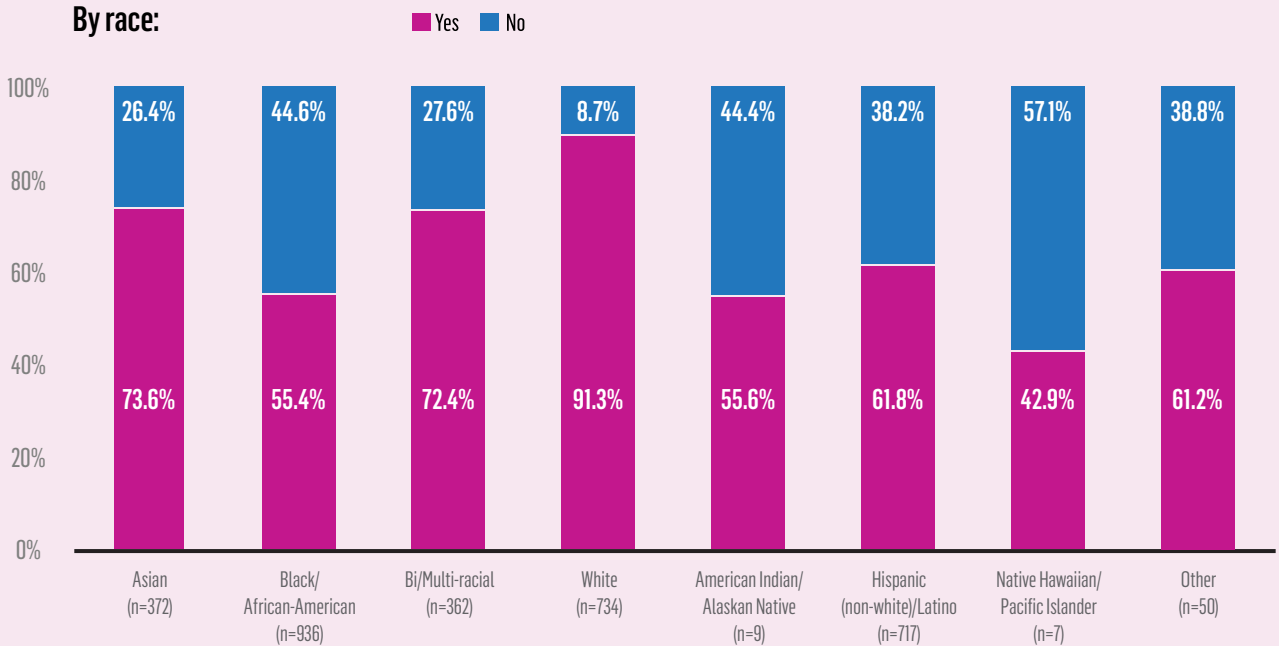
Chart 8 – Is there any part of your own identity that you believe helps **keep you safe** from criminal suspicion?



By self-identified sex:



By race:



According to almost all students (98 percent) and 100 percent of faculty/administrators, some people have an easier time getting out of legal trouble than others, suggesting that inequities may extend into courtrooms as well. Students, faculty and administrators most frequently identified “white people” and “wealthy people” as those who have an easier time getting out of legal trouble, and their comments reflect their belief of racial and socioeconomic imbalances in the country’s legal system.



Responses made regarding which people have an easier time getting out of legal trouble:

Students:

“Men, white people, those of the higher socioeconomic classes.”

Hispanic/Latino, female, age 19

“Money goes a long way towards getting justice.”

White, male, age 19

“People with more money or access to more resources can get out of legal trouble.”

Hispanic/Latino, female, age 19

“Those who have wealth and white privilege.”

Black, male, age 22

“Wealthy people have opportunities to get away with their crimes.”

Hispanic/Latino, female, age 19

Faculty/Administrators:

“Celebrities and people with greater education and knowledge of the legal system.”

White, male, age 32

“People who can afford expensive lawyers.”

White, female, age 60

“Those with racial, economic, or educational privilege.”

White, female, age 34

Increased security/police presence and stricter disciplinary practices in schools across the United States over the years have brought the notion of a “school-to-prison pipeline” into the criminal justice conversation. Researchers have found stark racial differences among which students end up being punished in school as early as preschool, and the affect that has down the road on juvenile incarceration rates. Data from the United States Department of Education shows that minority and male students face harsher, more frequent punishment and are more likely to be referred to law enforcement or subject to school-related arrests than their white peers. Black K–12 public school students receive out-of-school suspensions at a rate 3.8 times that of white students, are expelled at a rate 1.9 times that of white students, and are 2.3 times as likely to be referred to law enforcement or to experience a school-related arrest compared to white students.⁹ A comprehensive study of Texas grade-school students and the effects of in-school discipline found that students who are punished for discretionary violations by being suspended or expelled are “nearly three times as likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice system the following year.”¹⁰ Disproportionately high rates of grade school discipline are experienced not only by racial minorities, but also by males and students with disabilities.⁹

51% of students believe that race affects how students are treated in elementary, middle and high school.

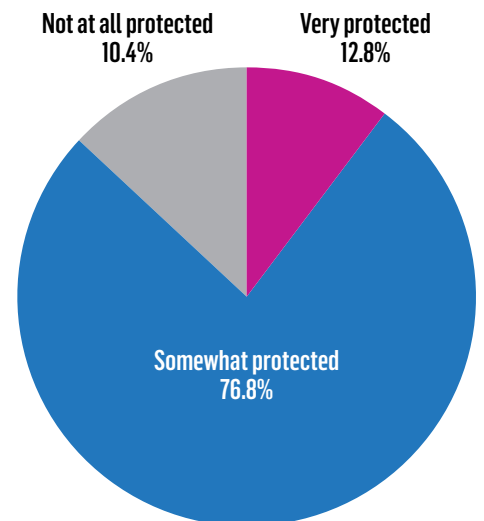
More than half of the students surveyed at the 2015 PPR believe that race affects how students are treated in elementary, middle and high school. Many felt that in their own school experiences, black students and Hispanic/Latino students were disciplined most often and most severely compared to white students, whose misbehavior was often overlooked.



United States Laws

Seventy-seven percent of students feel only “somewhat protected” by the laws of the United States and 10 percent feel “not at all protected” (see Chart 9). Almost all (94 percent) believe that some laws are discriminatory. This may explain why 81 percent of students believe it is sometimes okay to break the law and 88 percent believe there are some situations in which crime is justifiable. Most who feel that crime is sometimes justifiable specified that it depends on the circumstances; when it is a matter of survival or self-defense, for example. Despite this, students generally rate themselves as law-abiding. Only 22 percent think that it is okay to ignore a law that they consider to be unjust and less than half (42 percent) say that it is okay to ignore a law they consider to be outdated.

Chart 9 – To what extent do you feel protected by the laws of the United States?

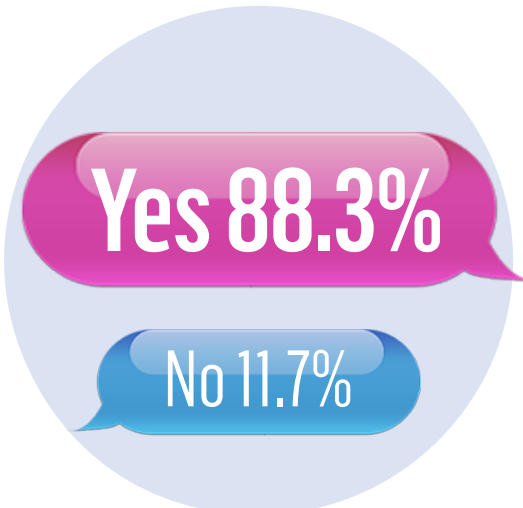


Crime + Punishment: Room for Change

The majority of student responses throughout the survey reflect a view of the current system of criminal justice as discriminatory and harsh. The students would like to see the system void of racial profiling and discrimination so that people of color and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds receive fair trials, have access to experienced lawyers, and are treated the same as their white and wealthy counterparts are treated. Students had a number of ideas for improving the criminal justice system.

Although some students believe that some crimes, such as sexual offenses and homicide, justify harsher punishments, many are generally in favor of an overall decrease in prison sentences. These students propose decreasing prison time for crimes related to drug use and possession, and believe that relaxing current drug laws would reduce the number of people incarcerated (see Chart 10). As an alternative to punitive measures, students propose providing rehabilitation for those with substance abuse issues and believe that possession and use of marijuana and some other drugs should be decriminalized. In the case of marijuana, which has

Chart 10 – Do you think that relaxing drug laws would reduce the number of people incarcerated in the United States?



already been legalized in several states, a 2016 survey found that 61 percent of Americans support its legalization.^{11,12} Among students responding to the PPR survey, 84 percent believe that marijuana should be legal in the United States.

89% of students believe prison should primarily be to rehabilitate prisoners.

Most students expressed a desire for the entire system to focus on restorative justice. For example, 89 percent of students think the main purpose of prison should be to rehabilitate rather than to punish, a change from the punitive nature of prison they believe is in practice today (see Charts 11–12). Students also identified a set of crimes for which they think that rehabilitation is possible (see Chart 13). Almost all students (97 percent) do not think that the current system allows for an easy transition back to society for former inmates. An increase in educational, vocational and rehabilitative opportunities were proposed so that the imprisoned might experience a smoother transition into society after release. In general, whether to facilitate a better transition to society or for other reasons, most students believe that incarcerated individuals should have access to job training, higher education, mental health services, arts programs, Medicare and Medicaid, and employment opportunities at or above minimum wage (see Chart 14). More than three-quarters of students also believe that individuals should retain the right to vote while incarcerated and/or after being convicted of a felony, and that no matter the crime committed, once an incarcerated individual completes their sentence, they should regain full rights as citizens (see Chart 15).

97% of students do not think that the current system allows for an easy transition back to society for former inmates.

Chart 11 – Should the main purpose of prison be punitive or rehabilitative?

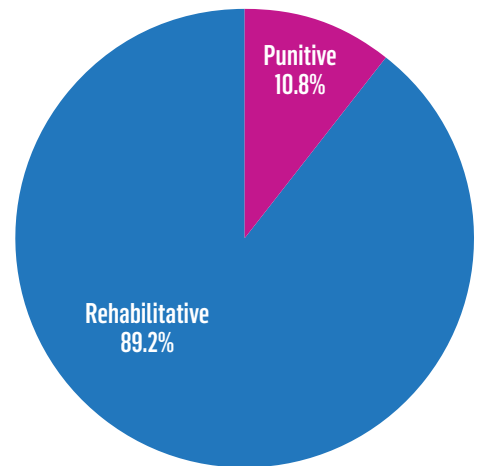


Chart 12 – Which do you believe to be the main purpose today?

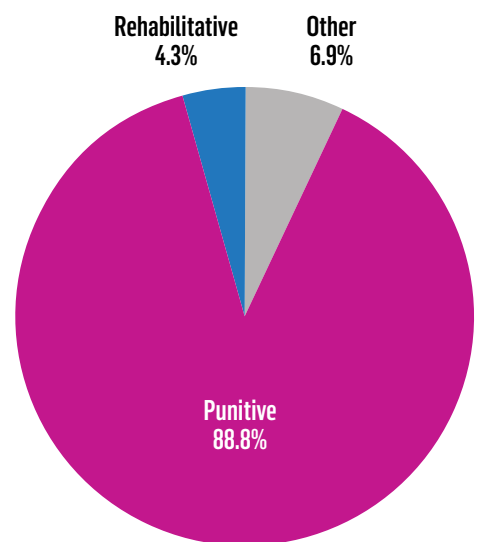


Chart 13 – For the following crimes, do you believe rehabilitation is possible?

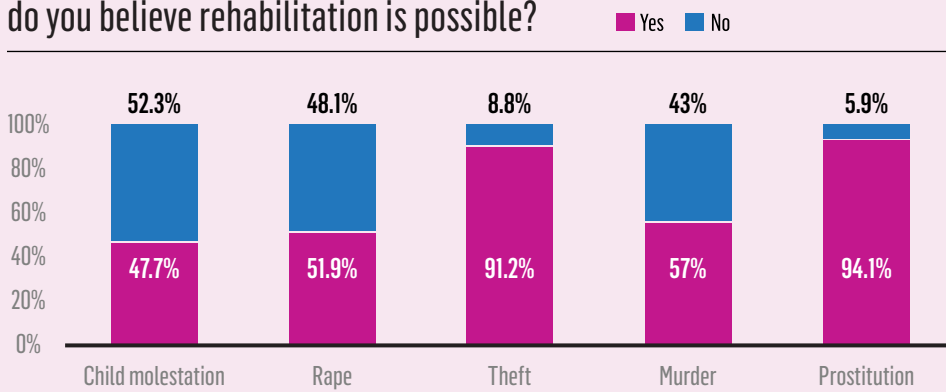
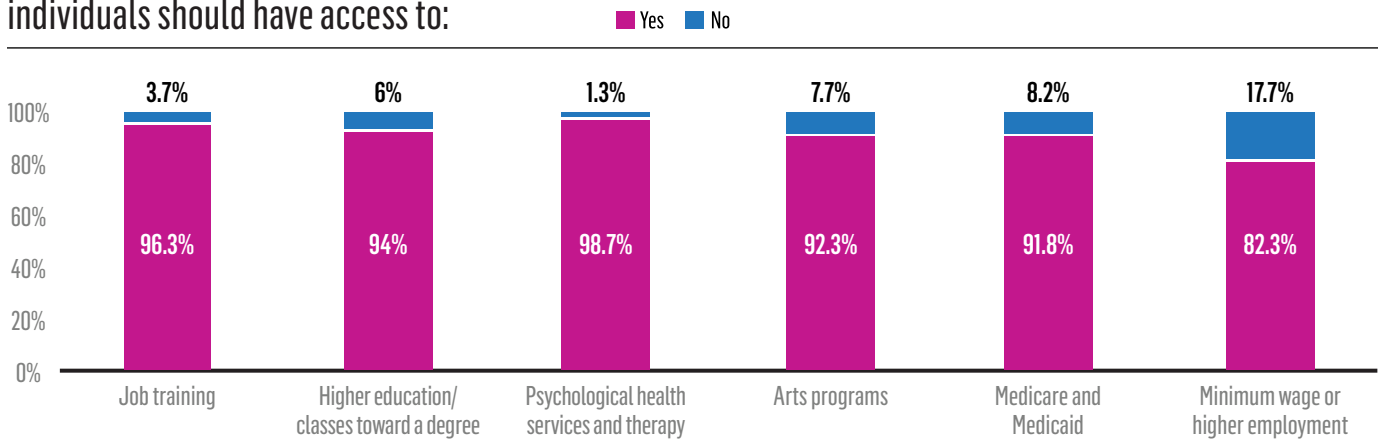


Chart 15 – Whatever the crime, everyone should be entitled to regain their full rights as citizens once they complete a prison sentence.



Chart 14 – Do you believe that incarcerated individuals should have access to:



Almost 60 percent of students think that the racial breakdown of prison inmates should reflect the racial composition of the general population. In reality, a disproportionately high percentage of the prison population is comprised of people of color. Thirty-eight percent of state prisoners are black, 21 percent are Hispanic and 35 percent are white. In the United States' population, 13 percent are black, 17 percent are Hispanic, and a majority (62 percent) are white.⁷ This imbalance is due to higher incarceration rates for minorities (the average rate at which each group is incarcerated per 100,000 people in the general population). African-Americans, for example, are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate 5.1 times higher than whites, and Latinos at a rate 1.4 times higher than whites.⁷

To eliminate racial bias and discrimination, some students called for police to receive better training and to be held accountable and face real penalties for any crimes they commit. Others stated that the current laws are outdated and should be reformed to fit modern times. They also indicated a desire for more diversity, especially racial diversity, among law enforcement, court officials and jury members. While a little less than half of students (45 percent) think more people of color on the police force would reduce arrests of minorities, 89 and 92 percent of students believe there should be more female police and police officers of color than there are currently. Today, white men constitute the majority of America's police force: 73 percent of local police are white and 88 percent are male.⁸





Responses from students regarding one thing they would change about the U.S. criminal justice system.

“Creating a system where those of color are not inherently discriminated against.”

“Abolish jails, promote rehabilitation programs.”

“Adding a whole lot more diversity to all aspects of the justice system; officers, judges, juries.”

“Allow for drug use to be legal.”

“End the prison-industrial complex, take money out of the prison system.”

“Non-violent crimes would have lesser sentences, more rehabilitation and job training.”

“Less drug related arrests and changes for people of color and poor folks.”

“More fines and less sentencing for petty crimes like weed, possession, etc.”

“Everything.”

“Equal access to criminal justice defenders.”

“More people of color in the justice system.”

Conclusion

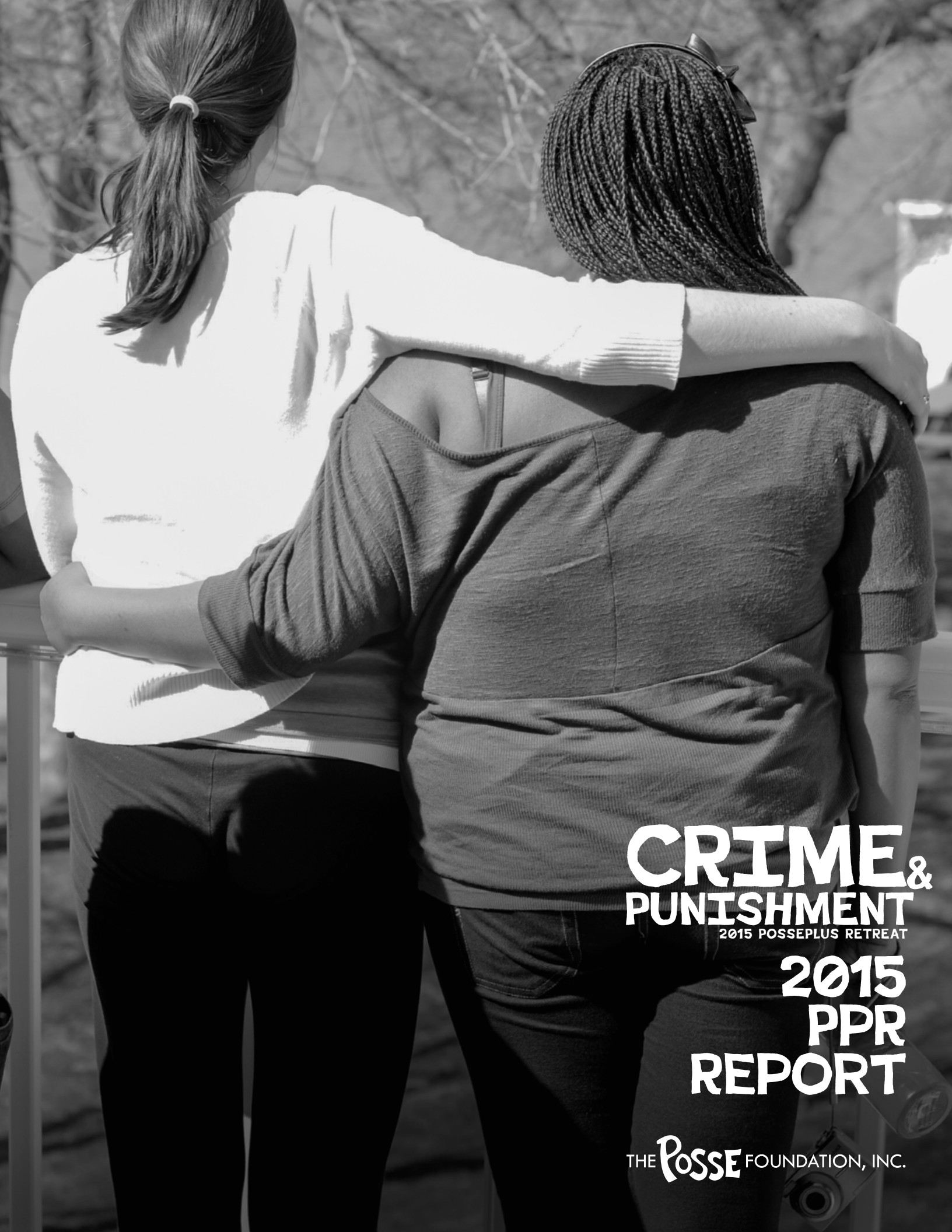
The 2015 Crime and Punishment PossePlus Retreat participants believe that the United States justice system is failing. While these students generally see themselves as law-abiding citizens who maintain a level of respect for the law and law enforcement, few feel truly protected by the laws of the United States or safe under the watchful eye of the police. Instead, they define the entire system as ineffective and discriminatory. They believe it is troubled by mass incarceration—that prevalent racism and discrimination throughout the criminal justice system place a disproportionate number of males, minorities and low-income individuals behind bars. And, in general, they believe the criminal justice system as it now stands does not meet the demands of justice.

Proposed strategies by students to help lessen discrimination and reduce the overall prison population include revising laws, reducing sentences for all but the most violent crimes, and increasing staff diversity throughout the system. For those that are imprisoned, students support a model of incarceration that would provide prisoners with an array of social service resources and the support needed to ease their transition from prison back into society. Overall, these students would like to see a system that rehabilitates rather than punishes and that is free of racial profiling and other forms of discrimination, thereby allowing the law to be fairly applied to all.



End Notes

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