

Opinions of policy insiders: the criminal/legal system within Michigan

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The Michigan State University School of Social Work

OPINIONS OF POLICY INSIDERS:  
THE CRIMINAL/LEGAL SYSTEM  
WITHIN MICHIGAN

SHERYL KUBIAK, PHD, DASHA SHAMROVA, MSW

## BACKGROUND

In September-October 2016, Office of Survey Research at Michigan State University (MSU) Institute for Public Policy and Social Research in partnership with the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the University of Michigan has conducted the first round of the survey entitled: Michigan Policy Insider Panel (MPIP). The goal of the survey is to explore how political stakeholders learn about social problems, including issues involving the criminal justice system - the focus of this report.

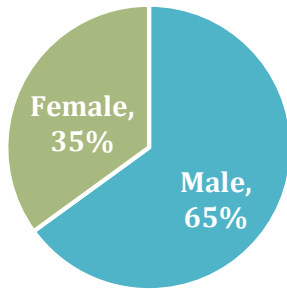
## METHODOLOGY

- **Mode:** This survey utilized confidential online panel mode that is planned to query the same respondents monthly or bi-monthly to ascertain their opinions on various public policy issues. This report is based on the one wave of data.
- **Sample:** The target group of this survey includes “political insiders” in the State of Michigan. For example, high-ranking members of state government agencies, current members of Michigan’s Legislature and their staff assistants, association, and corporate lobbyists, state relations officers, think tanks, public relations professionals, and state political media personnel. A total of 2,970 insiders were invited to join the panel. The recruitment survey was fielded from September 14 to October 2, 2016. During this time, 786 participants accessed the survey (26.6% of all invited). Of the 786 who agreed to participate in the survey, 68.3 percent completed the survey and joined the panel. The overall completion rate for the study is 18.1 percent.
  - This report focused on the opinions of political insiders in regards to criminal justice. Therefore, only those respondents who were asked about this particular issue were included in the analysis. A total of 415 political insiders answered the questions of interest. Thus all subsequent analysis will be based on this subsample of 415 respondents.

## FINDINGS

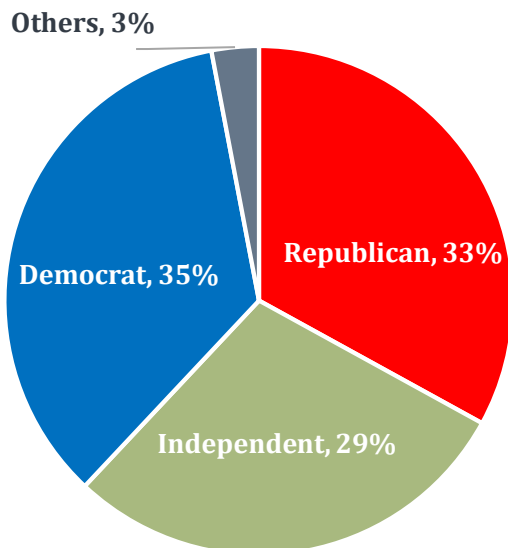
### Demographics of the Respondents

**Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gender**

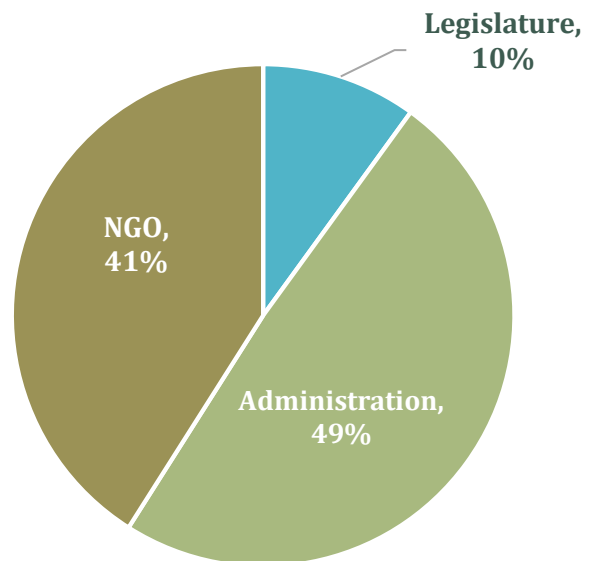


A total of 415 political stakeholders responded to the survey; 65% of them were males (Figure 1.). Individuals from both Republican and Democrat parties were equally represented (33% and 35%) with 29% claiming to be independents. Nearly one third (31%) worked more than 20 years in their current positions, with 19% in position for 5 years or less (Figure 4). Average age was 51, with the majority of individuals between 35-55 years old (62%) (Figure 5). About half of the political stakeholders were employed by executive branch, and 41% working for nongovernmental organizations, and 10 % worked with the legislative branch (Figure 3).

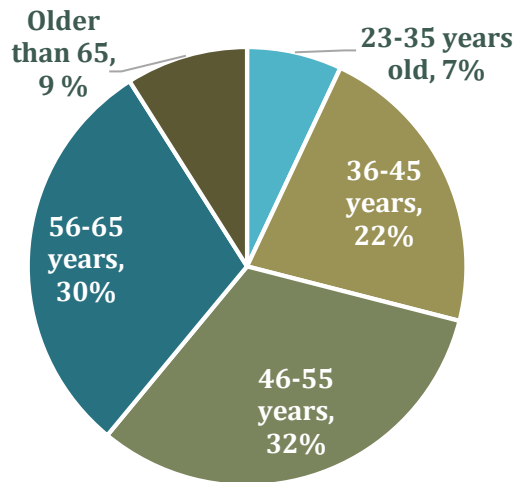
**Figure 2. Participants by Party Affiliation**



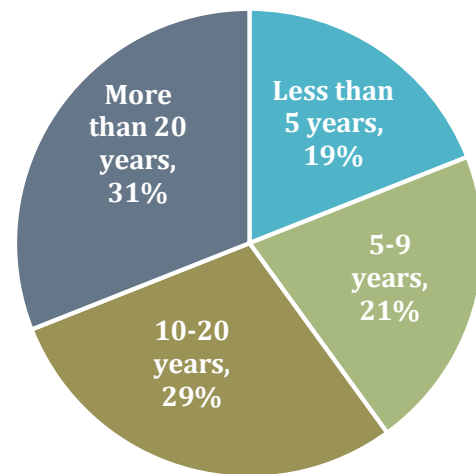
**Figure 3. Respondents by Type of Employer**



**Figure 4. Age of respondents**  
(Average 51 years, ranging from 23 to 75)



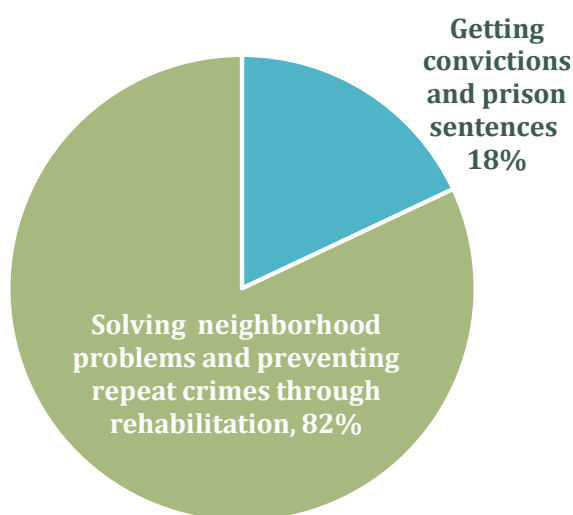
**Figure 5. Respondents by Length of Service in Current Positions**



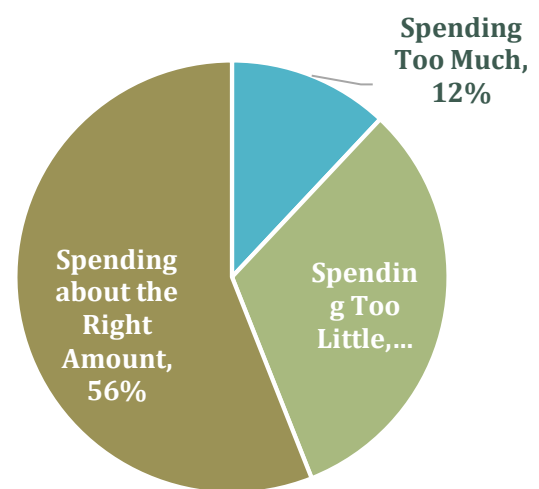
### General Attitudes about Criminal Justice

The participants were asked about their general attitudes about the criminal/legal system. Figure 6 below demonstrates that a majority of respondents (82%) believe that the role of prosecutors should be solving neighborhood problems, rather than focuses on convictions and prison sentences (18%). More than half (56%) agreed that the spending on law enforcement is adequate (Figure 7), but 69% of stakeholders believed the state was spending

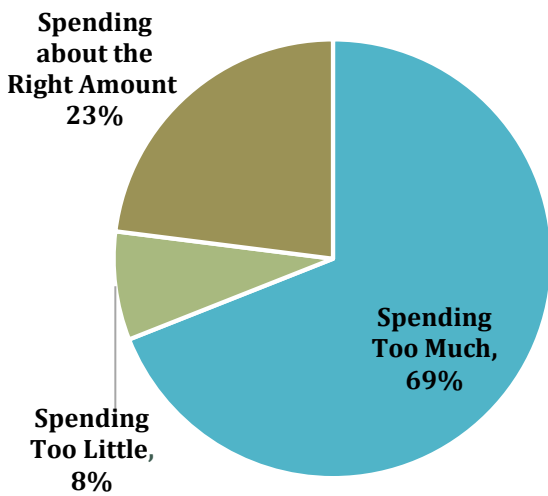
**Figure 6. Which should be prosecutors' primary goal?**



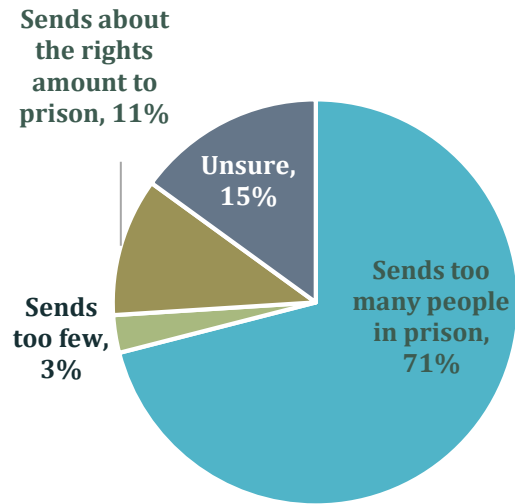
**Figure 7. Spending: Law Enforcement**



**Figure 8. Spending: Prisons**

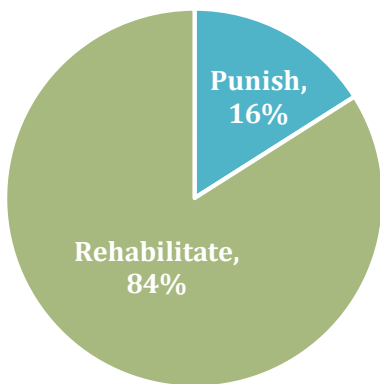


**Figure 9. Generally speaking, do you believe the state of Michigan:**

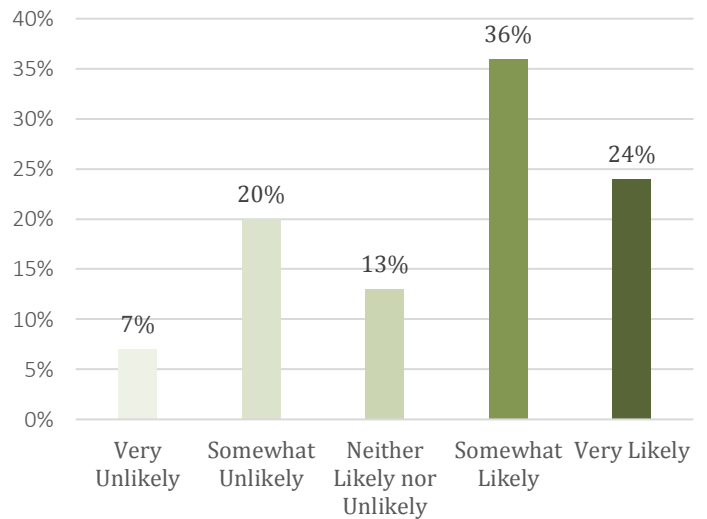


too much on prisons (Figure 8). Additionally, 71% of political stakeholders believe MI sends too many people to prison (Figure 9). Moreover, the vast majority of respondents (84%) support the rehabilitation of individuals who commit crime, rather than punishment (Figure 10). Queries regarding criminal justice reform found that 60% of respondents thought that legislation would be “Somewhat Likely” or “Very Likely” to be passed by 2018 (Figure 11).

**Figure 10. Do you think we should be more focused on punishing people who commit crimes or rehabilitating them?**



**Figure 11. How likely will Criminal Justice Reform be passed by 2018?**

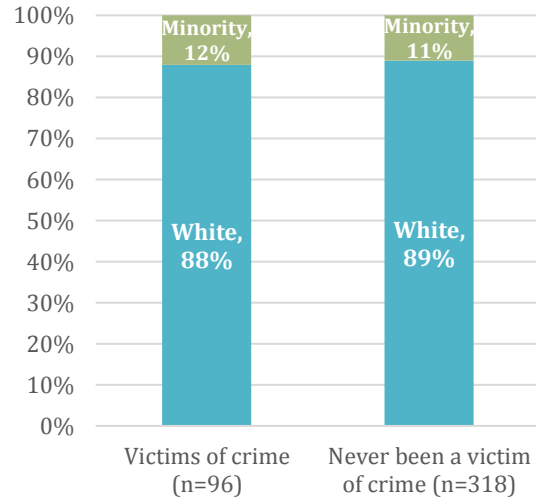


## Opinions of Victims of Crimes about Criminal Justice

**Figure 12. Victims of crime by gender**

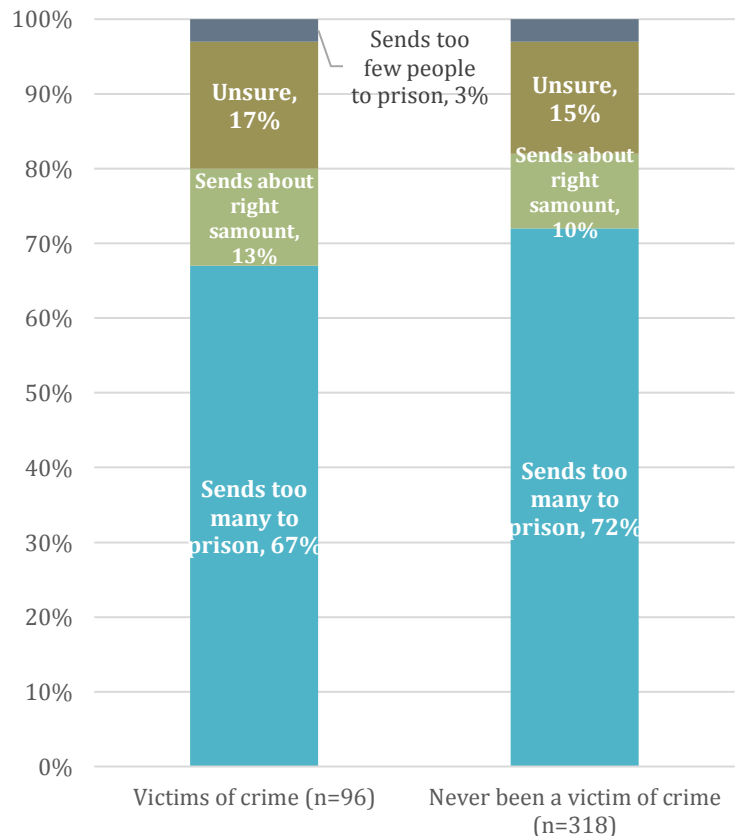


**Figure 13. Victims of crime by race**

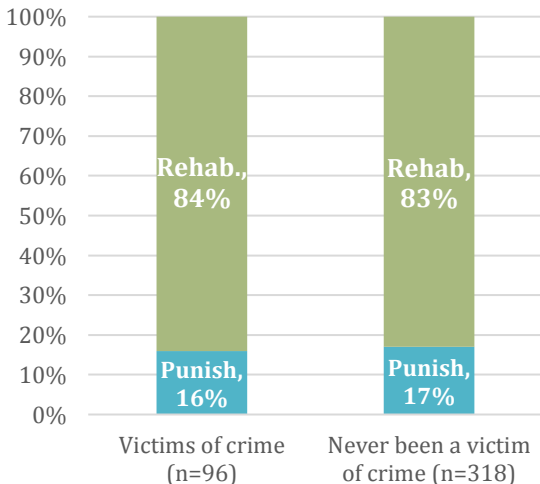


Ninety-six stakeholders (23%) noted that they were victims of crime within the past five years. Males and females, as well as white and minority groups, were equally likely to be a victim of crime in this sample of respondents (Figure 12, 13). Being a victim of crime brings an additional level of

**Figure 15. Opinion on imprisonment in Michigan  
Victims and Non-victims of Crime (NS)**



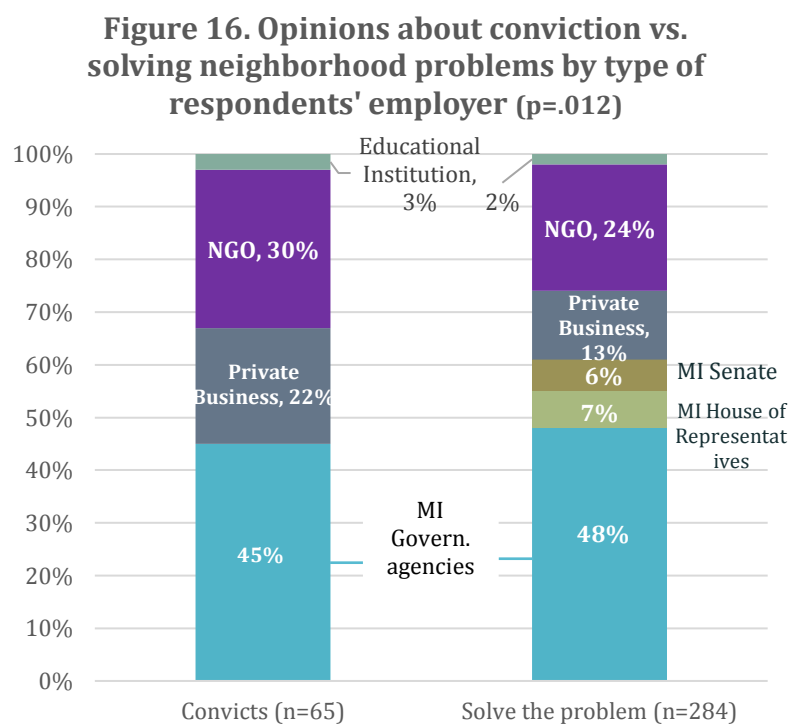
**Figure 14. Opinion on Punish vs. Rehabilitate among Victims and Non-victims of Crime (NS)**



complexity to this analysis as this experience can impact one's opinion of the criminal/legal system. However, our findings show no significant differences between opinions of those who personally experienced crime and those who did not (Figure 14, 15).

When comparing the two groups, nearly equal proportions of respondents support rehabilitation (84% and 83%) (Figure 14). When asked if MI sends too many people to prison, 67% of those who experienced crime agreed, compared to 72% who have not experienced crime (Figure 15).

### Prosecutors Role: Convictions vs. Solving Problems by Employment Position



Respondents were asked: "Should the primary goal of prosecutors be getting as many convictions and prison sentences as possible or solving neighborhood problems and stopping repeat crimes through rehabilitation, even if it means fewer convictions?" Although 82% answered that the goal of prosecutors is to resolve problems, there were significant differences by gender, age, political affiliation and respondents' employer. Figure 16 illustrates that while there are similarities across many of the employer type, 'solving problems' was the choice

endorsed by MI House and Senate Members exclusively. Stakeholders employed within private businesses were more likely to endorse conviction than neighborhood problem solving (Figure 16<sup>1</sup>).

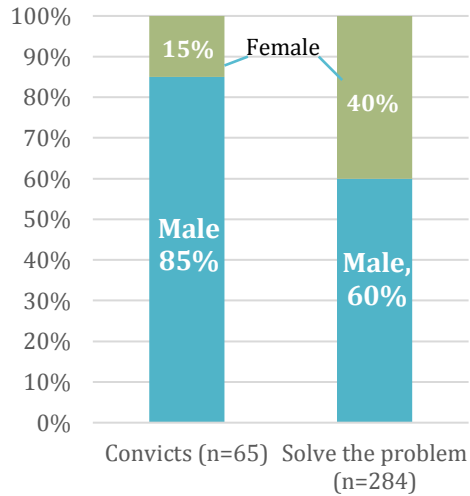
Males were more likely than females (85% vs. 60%) to endorse conviction as the prosecutors' role (Figure 17<sup>2</sup>). Similarly, older respondents were more likely than younger to supported conviction as a goal of prosecution (Figure 19). Respondents affiliated with the Republican Party were twice as likely to endorse conviction as compared to Democrats (Figure 18<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>1</sup>  $X^2(6) = 16.28, p < .05$

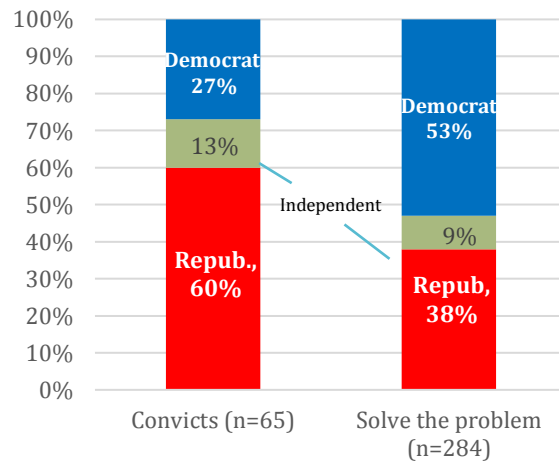
<sup>2</sup>  $X^2(1) = 13.672, p < .001$

<sup>3</sup>  $X^2(2) = 13.969, p < .05$

**Figure 17. Opinions about conviction vs. solving neighborhood problems by gender (p <.001)**

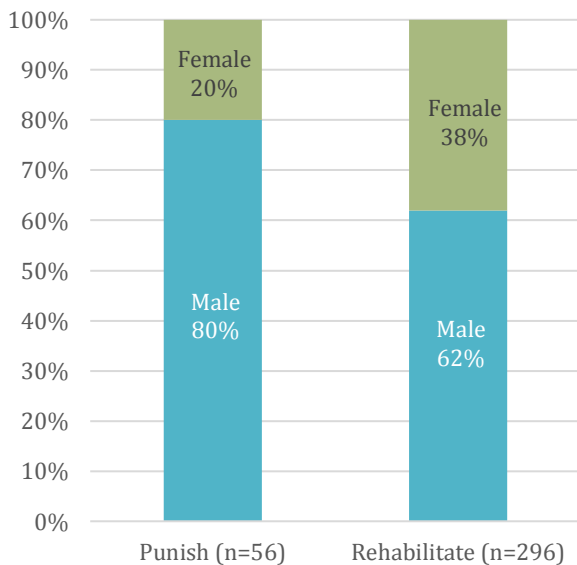


**Figure 18. Opinions about conviction vs. solving neighborhood problems by party affiliation (p=.001)**

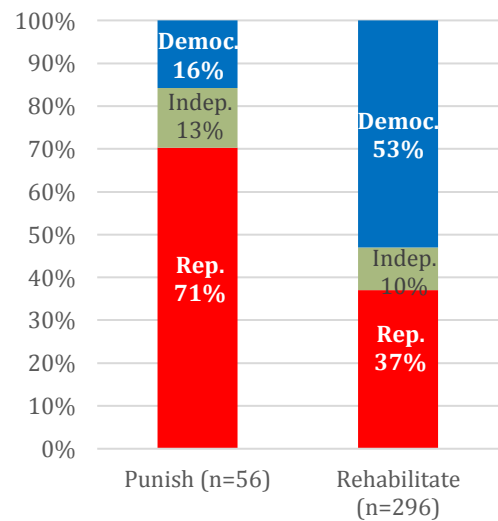


**Opinions on Punishment vs. Rehabilitation**

**Figure. 19 Opinions about punishing vs. rehabilitating people by gender (p=.009)**



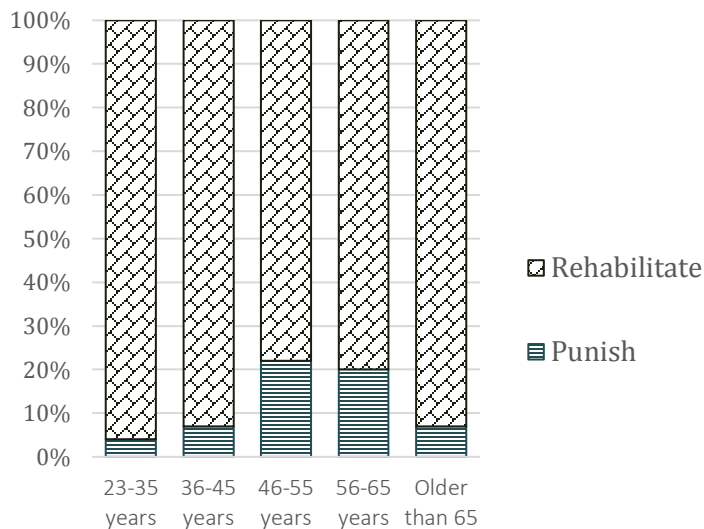
**Figure 20. Opinions about punishing vs. rehabilitating people by party affiliation (p<.001)**



Respondents were queried: “Should the focus of the criminal justice system be on punishing people or rehabilitating people who commit crimes?” Males were more likely to endorse



**Figure 21. Opinions about punishing vs. rehabilitating by age groups (p = .008)**



punishment as compared to females (Figure 19<sup>4</sup>). The majority (71%) of those who supported punishment said they are affiliated with the Republican Party (Figure 20<sup>5</sup>). Respondents between age 46 and 65 were more likely to endorse punishment as a goal of the criminal justice system than other age groups (Figure 21<sup>6</sup>).

7 out of 10 people who thought we send too few people to prison had an affiliation with the Republican Party (Figure 23<sup>7</sup>).

## CONCLUSION

This report focuses on the opinions of ‘policy insiders’ – individuals who are active in governing and the political process. Some are members of the legislative or administrative branch of the government, while others are business leaders with a stake in the political process.

- Overwhelmingly political stakeholders participating in this survey believe that the criminal/legal system should be more about problem solving and rehabilitation.
- There is consensus across these stakeholders that criminal justice reform will be passed by 2018.
- The majority of these insiders believes that there are too many people are sent to the prisons and prison related costs are too high.
- Being a recent victim of crime does not appear to influence the opinions of the respondents about the rehabilitative need of the individuals who committed crimes.
- Age, gender, and political affiliation seem to be consistently differentiate opinions among those who hold punishing vs. rehabilitative views on the criminal justice system in Michigan.

<sup>4</sup>  $X^2(1) = 6.858, p < .05$

<sup>5</sup>  $X^2(2) = 26.123, p < .001$

<sup>6</sup>  $X^2(4) = 13.902, p < .05$

<sup>7</sup>  $X^2(6) = 29.348, p < .001$