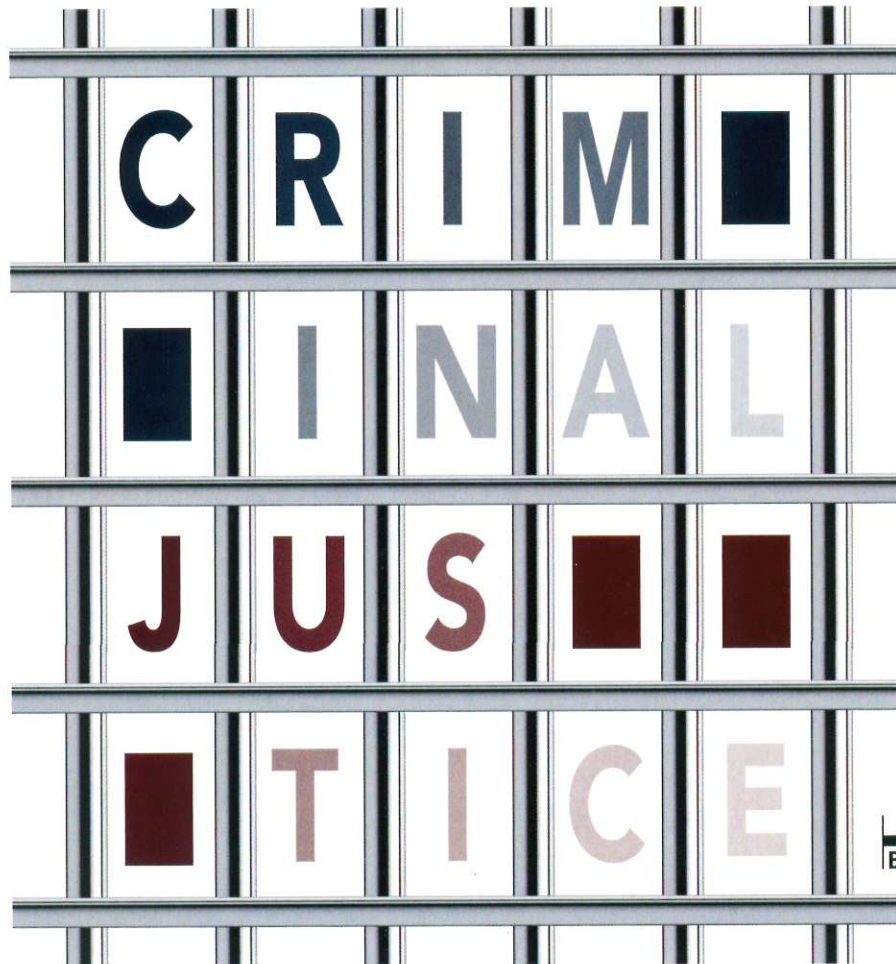


AZ TOWN HALL EXPLORES



BY TIM EIGO

This year, the Arizona Town Hall focuses on the criminal justice system—a complicated mechanism that is receiving heightened scrutiny in present-day America.

The 111th Arizona Town Hall on Criminal Justice will be held on November 8-10, 2018, at the Sheraton Crescent Hotel in Phoenix. Those interested in making an impact before then are invited to participate in Community Town Halls (lasting a few hours or full day) held around the state throughout the fall. They include events in Prescott (Sept. 12), Marana (Sept. 14) and Mesa (Sept. 18). Town Hall leaders want to hear from all stakeholders affected by the topic, so Community Town Halls also will be held in Arizona prisons—the Whetstone Unit in Pima County and the

Lewis Facility in Pima County. (See sidebar for a link to upcoming events.)

No matter their practice areas, attorneys may be interested in the dialogue. Given the widespread effects of drug prosecution, the

THE ARIZONA FOCUS EMANATES FROM A RENEWED NATIONWIDE DIALOGUE ON POLICING, CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND INCARCERATION.

persistence of the opioid crisis, and the broad impacts felt by those facing court fines and fees, it may be the rare Arizonan whose family or friend circle is untouched by the criminal justice system. Indeed, the Arizona focus emanates from a renewed nationwide

dialogue on policing, criminal justice and incarceration.

Officials from the Town Hall—a statewide nonprofit that has been spurring civil dialogue and civic action for 55 years—understand that “criminal justice” means different things to different people. It is a complex web of agencies, stakeholders and sometimes-competing missions that has the opportunity to create deep community engagement—or robust community opposition.

It is those opportunities and visions that spurred the organization to select criminal justice as this year’s topic. In previous years the group examined topics as diverse as school funding, sustainable water use and the Arizona–Mexico relationship.

Like this year’s chosen topic, the Town

GETTING INVOLVED

UPCOMING COMMUNITY TOWN HALLS

Prescott..... Sept. 12
 Marana..... Sept. 14
 Mesa..... Sept. 18

An updated list of events and dates can be found at

http://aztownhall.org/Community_Programs/

Hall is both simple and complex.

The simple part is the fact that the selection of a single annual issue focuses the attention. It brings in the diverse voices of many who might otherwise avoid the dialogue if it covered everything under the sun.

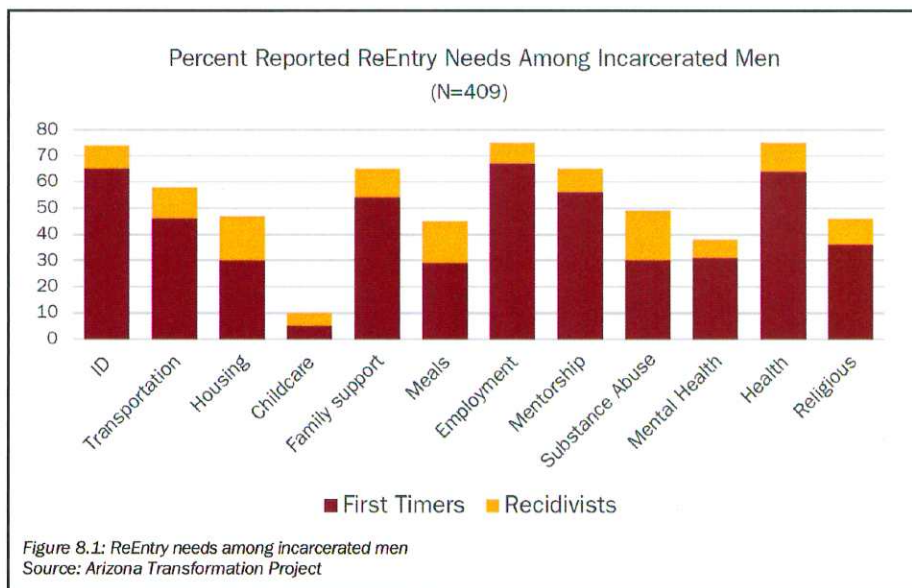
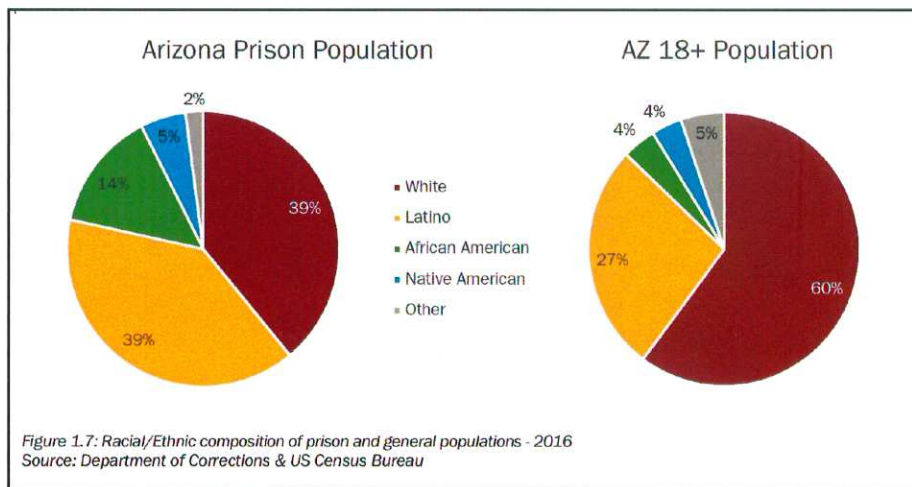
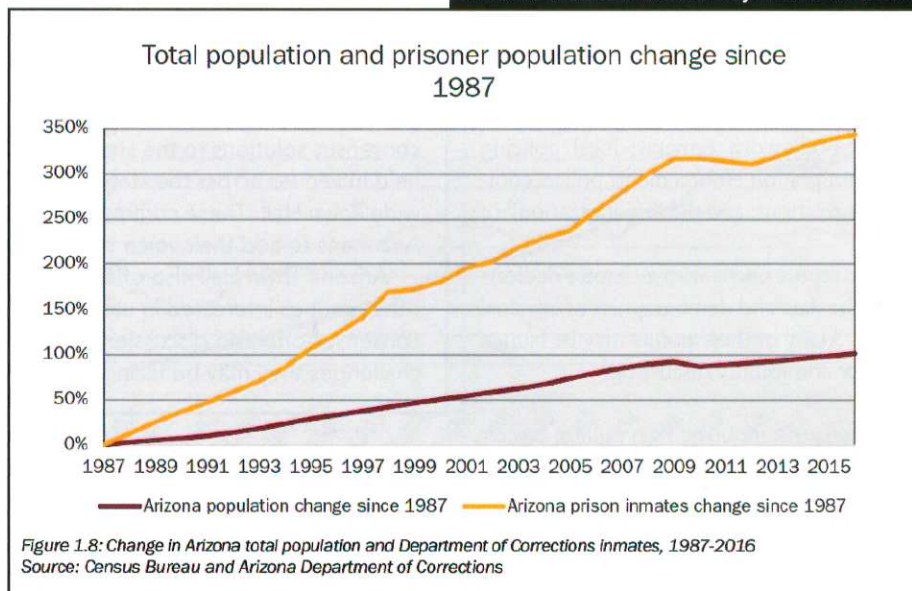
The complex part is the recognition that criminal justice encompasses a dizzying number of interrelated parts. The wide variety of elements is hinted at in the organization's 67-page background report on the topic. Researched and drafted by subject-matter experts in partnership with ASU's Morrison Institute for Public Policy, it serves as a baseline touchpoint for those interested in the issue—among them attendees at the numerous Community Town Halls. The report includes chapters on bail, fines and fees; the charging process; sentencing and incarceration; vulnerable populations; re-entry and recidivism; Native American issues; and policing.

For many people, that last element—policing—is what leaps to mind when criminal justice is mentioned.

That's because police are "the most visible aspect of the criminal justice system," says Phoenix Police Department Lieutenant Brian Issitt in one of the "personal insights" included in the report.

Issitt says he recalls when his father was a sworn officer in Michigan back in the 1970s and 1980s. He says that's when officers "were just expected to enforce the law." Today, though, police are expected to develop deep connections with the communities they serve and to "do our best with the mental health issues."

How well or poorly officers are able to be jacks of all trades has an immediate and sometimes incendiary reaction by the community. Issitt cites police use of force as one area that has become a subject of intense



controversy.

Just within policing, though, use of force and mental health are simply two of many

aspects Town Hall attendees may address. Others include how more than 140 Arizona police agencies with 15,000 officers can

AZ TOWN HALL EXPLORES CRIMINAL JUSTICE

coordinate; whether there are an adequate number of officers as crime rates have declined; body-worn cameras; local policing and immigration enforcement; police-community relations; and the “militarization” of police.

The report opens with a chapter dedicated to the data and demographics of criminal justice. Many of these points may be launch pads for community discussion:

- The courts are busy. Two million cases were filed in Arizona’s court system in 2016.
- Low-income people often have difficulty paying bail, forcing them to await trial in jail.
- Imposing money bail does not improve the chances that low-risk offenders will return to court, nor does it protect the public, because many high-risk defendants have access to money and can post bail.
- Arizona has the fifth-highest percentage of prisoners per capita. There are more than 42,000 people incarcerated by the state and in private prisons in Arizona. In addition, federal facilities in Arizona hold about 4,000 inmates, and county jails hold another 14,000. The state has an incarceration rate of 596 per 100,000 population—while the national rate is 385 per 100,000 population.
- Since 1987, Arizona has doubled its overall population, today reaching

HOW THE TOWN HALL WORKS

The organization’s signature events include statewide Town Halls convened to bring diverse Arizonans together for facilitated, civil discussions leading to consensus solutions to the state’s most pressing issues. Community programs are held in venues across the state during the months before and after each statewide Town Hall. These community gatherings provide an opportunity for more Arizonans to add their voice to the discussions.

Arizona Town Hall also offers consulting services to government, business and other entities interested in using Arizona Town Hall’s unique system of facilitated, consensus-oriented discussions to find common ground and bring solutions to challenges they may be facing. Information at aztownhall.org.

about 7 million people. In that time, the prison population has increased fourfold.

- The number of crimes committed has been declining—by one-third since 2006—despite population increases.
- On average, every Arizona taxpayer contributes \$525 each year to fund the city, county and statewide criminal justice system.
- The average citizen is more likely to be a victim of a property crime rather than violent crime. From 2006 to 2016, property crimes have decreased 28 percent.

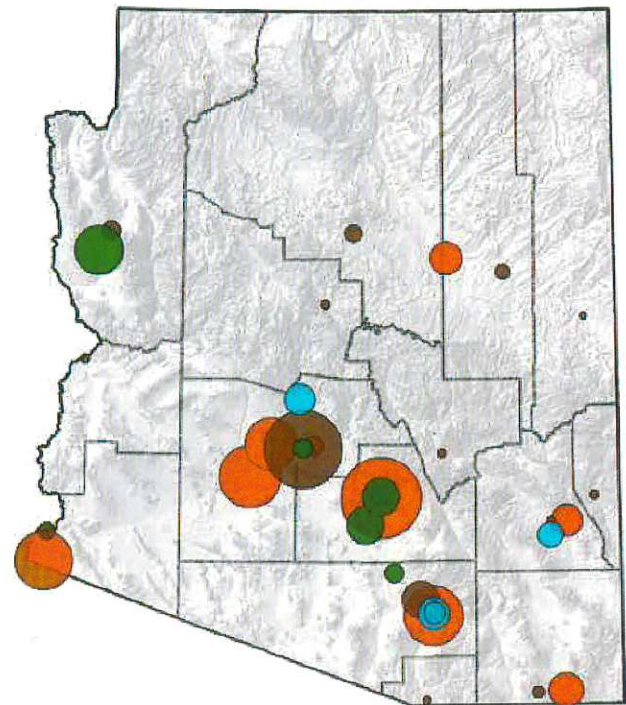


FIGURE 1.5:

Correctional facilities in Arizona, circles sized to relative inmate populations.



- Over the same period, as the state’s population increased, the absolute number of violent crimes dropped 20 percent.

Town Hall attendees will explore many questions, such as:

- Are the state’s systems set up to most effectively keep people safe?
- Are they providing equal protection?
- Is the more than \$1 billion spent on criminal justice being invested wisely?

Number of Persons Imprisoned in Arizona, 1980-2014

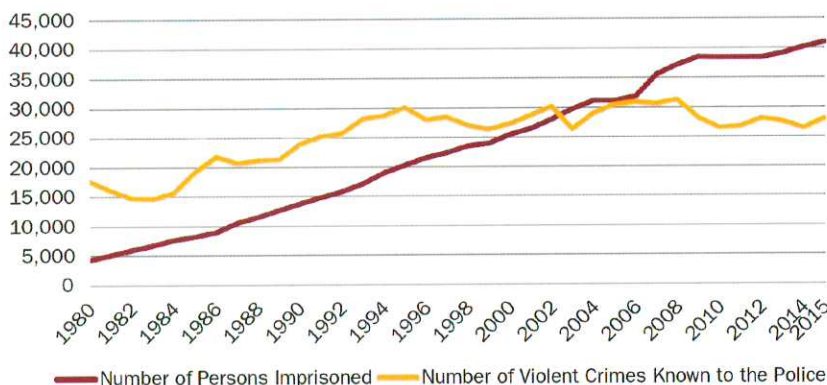

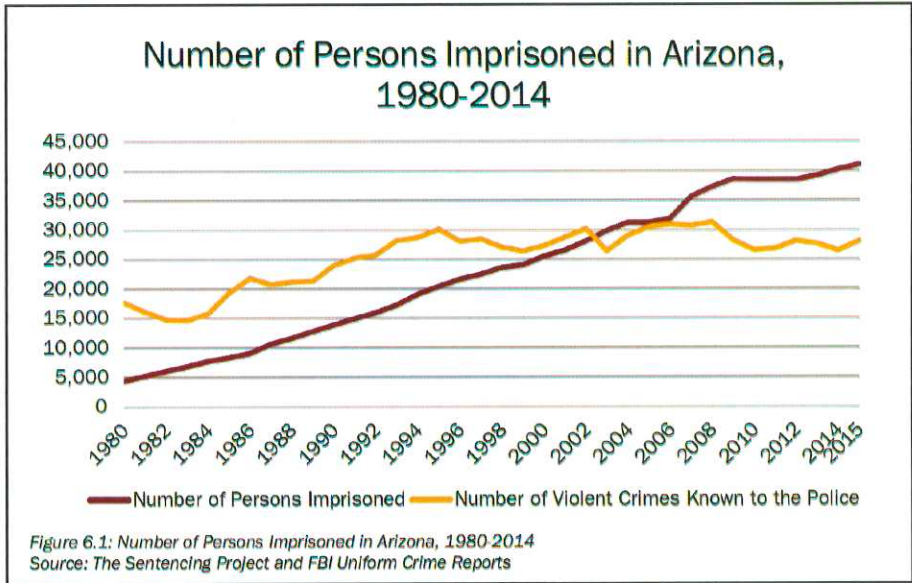


Figure 6.1: Number of Persons Imprisoned in Arizona, 1980-2014
Source: The Sentencing Project and FBI Uniform Crime Reports

- Are we successfully returning people formerly incarcerated back into productive citizens?
- Are there ways to achieve greater success when working with vulnerable populations and when looking at sentencing guidelines, fines and other challenges?

In a facilitated dialogue, issues like these will be robustly discussed at the Town Hall in early November and in the community versions leading up to it and following it. Interested in the statewide gathering? Email townhall@aztownhall.org. More information about the complete initiative is available at aztownhall.org. 



the issues: read more here



- Criminal Justice in Arizona Background Report <https://tinyurl.com/AZTownHallReport>
- Criminal Justice in Arizona Key Facts <https://tinyurl.com/AZTownHallReportSummary>
- Community Town Hall Discussion Guidelines..... <https://tinyurl.com/AZTownHallGuidelines>
- Community Town Hall Discussion Questions..... <https://tinyurl.com/AZTownHallQuestions>
- Example Community Town Hall Report, from Downtown Phoenix <https://tinyurl.com/AZTownHallDTPH>

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