



# 2019 public survey of attitudes toward the justice system

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# About this research

Hāpaitia te Oranga Tangata – Safe and Effective Justice was launched in 2018 to help guide the transformation of the criminal justice system and create a safer New Zealand.

Alongside the Hāpaitia initiative, Te Uepū Hāpai i te Ora – Safe and Effective Justice Advisory Group was established to engage in a public conversation about what people in New Zealand want from their criminal justice system and to canvass a range of ideas about how it can be improved.

With support from the Hāpaitia engagement team, Te Uepū listened to thousands of New Zealanders from all over the country, including people who had been harmed by crime, people who had harmed others, and people and organisations working with the justice system. Te Uepū's final report, *Turuki! Turuki! Move together*, was released in December 2019.

Since the release of Te Uepū's first report *He Waka Roimata* in June 2019, Hāpaitia has continued the conversation about criminal justice reform, sharing data, evidence and insights with diverse communities across New Zealand via a range of digital, media and face-to-face channels.

In November 2019, Hāpaitia launched an online survey to help understand public perceptions and to test the appetite for transforming the criminal justice system.

The platform builds on the engagement undertaken by Te Uepū and others over the last 16 months by allowing members of the public to share their opinions on the key themes emerging from the national conversation to date. Relevant data and evidence was also available to encourage informed participation.

The engagement continued for a total of six weeks, until 18 December 2019. To reach as many New Zealanders as possible, the platform was promoted via social media, through stakeholder channels and at key events around the country.

To benchmark the representativeness of the response received through the digital engagement platform, the same survey (without the background information) has been run using a random nation-wide sample. This sample was more likely to be representative of the New Zealand population.

The current paper represents comparative results of the feedback received through the online survey (3294 responses) and from the random sample survey (1310 responses – response rate of 18%).

Hāpaitia te Oranga Tangata – Safe and Effective Justice welcomes your views on this discussion paper, which you can provide by email at [safeandeffective@justice.govt.nz](mailto:safeandeffective@justice.govt.nz) or through our social media pages (links are found on our website [safeandeffectivejustice.govt.nz](https://www.safeandeffectivejustice.govt.nz))

# Executive Summary

| The key findings from the high-level analysis of research results show that:

- An overwhelming majority of respondents disagree with the current distribution of funds within the criminal justice system. This shows a clear public appetite for change rather than keeping the status quo.
- Respondents are in favour of spending more on supporting victims, preventing crime, investing in offender rehabilitation programmes and in investigating crime. A relative majority of respondents are in favour of spending less on managing sentences and adjudicating cases.
- Most respondents perceive that victims' interests should be at the heart of the criminal justice system.
- A majority of respondents agree that Māori should take the lead on solutions to criminal justice issues for Māori.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents agree that less serious offences should be dealt with in communities instead of through the formal justice system.
- Respondents believe that the criminal justice system should mainly focus on preventing crime from happening in the first place.
- Almost half of the random sample survey respondents believe that crime is equally driven by socio-economic problems and personal choice, while 45% of the online engagement exercise participants think that socio-economic problems are the key driver. A quarter of the random sample survey respondents see personal choice as the preliminary driver of crime compared to only 13% of the online survey respondents.
- Almost half of the random sample survey respondents see the main purpose of a sentence as deterring the offender and others from committing similar offences. To the contrary, almost half of the online survey respondents perceive the main purpose as providing offenders with an opportunity for rehabilitation. However, punishing the offender for what they did was the least popular answer in both groups.
- Newspapers, either hard copy or online editions, continue to be one of the main sources of crime-related information for both groups. For the random sample survey respondents, the next major sources of crime related information are TV news (58%) and experience of people they know (40%), while for the online survey respondents the other highest sources of information are personal experience (39%), experience of relatives / friends (38%), and only then TV news (37%). These answers may suggest that either personal experience or experience of friends or relatives may be one of key drivers for participating in the online survey.

The demographic structure of both surveys is reasonably similar. The difference between proportions of the components of relevant demographic groups such as gender, age, ethnicity and location is mostly within five percentage points.

There are only two demographic groups with differences between proportions in the random sample and the online survey exceeding seven percentage points: 65+ age group (difference 11 percentage points) and Wellington location group (difference 13 percentage points). However, the difference in opinions between the random sample survey and the online survey participants may be not only because of the demographic structure – see our explanation of comparisons and weighting below.

The outcomes of both surveys, question by question, are briefly summarised in the Table 1 below. Many core results are similar in both surveys (bolded in the table).

**Table 1.**

## Brief outcomes of the random sample survey and the online survey

Question	Outcome
<p><b>Q1.</b> In your opinion, are we allocating resources in the right way?</p>	<p>Overwhelming (more than 80%) majority of respondents <b>in both surveys disagree with the current resource allocation.</b></p>
<p><b>Q2.</b> How you would change the way money is spent across the following categories?</p>	<p>A significant majority of respondents in both surveys would increase budget for victim support and preventing crime. Relative majority <b>in both surveys would decrease budget for managing sentences and adjudicating cases.</b></p>
<p><b>Q3.</b> Victims’ interest should be in the heart of the criminal justice system. Do you agree?</p>	<p>An overwhelming (more than 80%) majority of respondents <b>in both surveys agree with the statement.</b></p>
<p><b>Q4.</b> It’s important that Māori take the lead on solutions to criminal justice issues for Māori. Do you agree?</p>	<p>A majority (around 60%) of respondents <b>in both surveys agree with the statement.</b></p>
<p><b>Q5.</b> Less serious offences should be dealt with in communities instead of through the formal justice system. Do you agree?</p>	<p>An overwhelming (around 80%) majority of respondents <b>in both surveys agree with the statement.</b></p>
<p><b>Q6.</b> Why do you think people commit crime?</p>	<p>Around 40–50% of respondents <b>in both surveys believe that crime is equally driven by socio-economic problems and personal choice.</b> Remaining respondents in the random sample survey equally support socio-economic problems and personal choice while in the online survey tend to support socio-economic problems as a driver.</p>
<p><b>Q7.</b> What is the main thing the sentence should achieve?</p>	<p>Two objectives with the <b>least</b> support <b>in both surveys are punishing the offenders</b> (10% +/-3%) <b>and keeping communities safe</b> (16–19%). The highest priority for the random sample survey respondents is deterrence from committing similar offending while for the online survey respondents it was the opportunity for offender rehabilitation.</p>
<p><b>Q8.</b> What do you think the criminal justice system should mainly focus on?</p>	<p>Respondents <b>in both surveys</b> think that <b>the key focus of CJS should be preventing crime from happening in the first place.</b> Four other topics <b>in both surveys</b> were ranked differently but <b>reasonably close</b> (average rank between 2.9 – 3.6).</p>
<p><b>Q9.</b> What are your main sources of information about crime?</p>	<p>Random sample survey: <b>TV news, newspapers, experience of relatives/friends.</b></p> <p>Online survey: <b>newspapers, personal experience, experience of relatives/friends, TV news.</b></p>

# Analysis of the online survey and the random sample survey demographics – “self-selection” issue

The demographic structure of the online survey and the random sample survey is reasonably similar with the difference between proportions of relevant demographic groups such as gender, age, ethnicity and location not exceeding 7%. The following comparison is using overall New Zealand population structure based on Census 2018 estimates as a baseline. We are not assessing statistical significance of differences between the online engagement exercise and representative sample survey demographic structure for the reasons noted on p.8.

Female respondents are equally over-represented in both surveys (57%). Accordingly, male respondents are under-represented (note: 4% of the online engagement exercise respondents did not provide their gender).

As expected, the online survey has a higher proportion of participants from younger age groups (15–29 and 30–49 years of age) than the random sample survey. Direct comparison with the Census data is limited as the random sample survey does not allow participation of people younger than 15 while the online survey attracted very few respondents from this age group. After amending Census data by excluding the 0–14 age group (20%), both the online survey and the random sample survey under-

represent younger people (15–29 years of age) and over-represent the 50–64 years of age group. In addition, the online survey under-represents 65+ age group while the random sample survey slightly over-represents it.

Both main ethnic groups, Māori and NZ Europeans, actively participated in both surveys. Under-represented (also in both surveys) are ethnic groups other than Māori and NZ Europeans. Note that the random sample survey allowed to choose multiple ethnicity, so the total of ethnicities in the random sample survey exceeds 100%.

Both surveys attracted participants from all over New Zealand. However, Auckland is under-represented in both surveys while Wellington is over-represented, more notably in the online survey. Geographically, locations of the random sample survey participants are closer to Census data.



# Comparisons and weighting

**Statistical comparison.** The online survey belongs to so-called self-selection surveys. These surveys do not randomly select respondents. Rather, they allow respondents to make their own decision about participating in the survey. Self-selection surveys are used with a wide range of research designs as they may significantly reduce time and cost of data collection. At the same time these surveys are subject to self-selection bias and their results cannot be analysed using probabilistic statistical methods. In particular, it is not possible to assess margins of error, confidence intervals or to test statistical significance for a self-selection survey. Therefore, all comparisons between the results of the online survey and the random sample survey in this report is based on contextual analysis rather than on probabilistic statistical methods.

**Demographic weighting.** These results are based on unweighted survey data. Weighting of the online survey data is not statistically reasonable as the online survey is based on a non-probability sample (see above). Weighting of the random sample survey will be unlikely to change the narrative as most questions tested by the survey were either overwhelmingly agreed or overwhelmingly disagreed.

Table 2 provides detailed information about comparative demographic structure of both surveys.

**Table 2.**

Comparison of the demographic characteristics of the online survey and the random sample survey participants by different grouping variables

Grouping variable	Group of the survey participants	Online survey (%)	Random sample survey (%)	Difference (%)	Census 2018 (for reference)
Gender	Male	39%	43%	4%	49%
	Female	57%	57%	0%	51%
Age	15-29	17%	11%	6%	21%
	30-49	38%	33%	5%	26%
	50-64	30%	34%	3%	18%
	65+	12%	23%	11%	15%
Ethnicity	Māori	19%	25%	6%	17%
	NZ Europeans	72%	79%	7%	64%
	Chinese	1%	3%	2%	5%
	Indian	2%	2%	0%	5%
	Other or unknown ethnicities	4%	3%	1%	9%
Region	Auckland	20%	27%	6%	33%
	Wellington	28%	15%	13%	11%
	Other NI	26%	33%	7%	32%
	Canterbury	17%	13%	4%	13%
	Other SI	8%	13%	5%	12%



# Analysis of the research results

This section provides detailed comparative analysis of key outcomes of the online survey and the random sample survey.

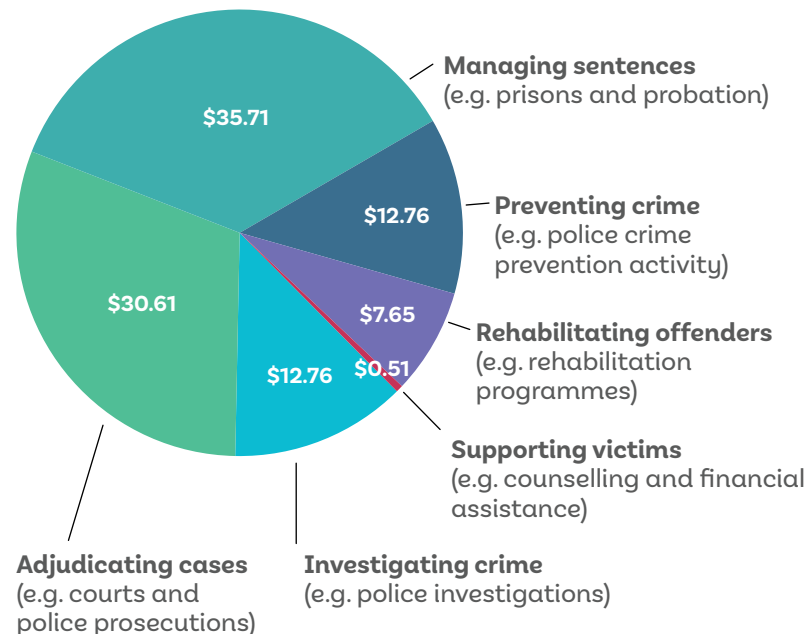
## The appetite for change is high

The most obvious outcome of both the online survey and the random sample survey is that they clearly demonstrate a large appetite for changes in the criminal justice system (CJS). Respondents were offered a

pie chart showing the current distribution of funds within the CJS (see Fig.1 below) and asked if they think that the resources are currently distributed in the right way.

**Figure 1.**

How every \$100 spent on the criminal justice system in New Zealand.

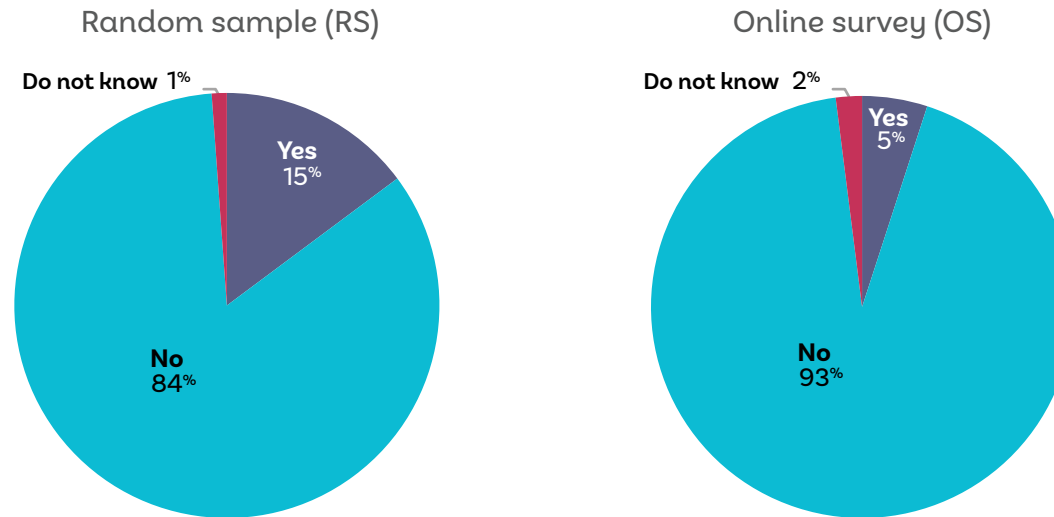


An overwhelming majority of both the online survey and the random survey respondents disagreed with the status quo – see Fig.2 below. Note that although a significant majority of the random survey participants (85%) responded in favour of change, the proportion of those supporting the status quo in the random survey (15%) is three times higher than in the online survey (5%).

**Figure 2.**

## In your opinion, are we allocating resources in the right way?

(Left: the random sample survey respondents; right – the online survey respondents)



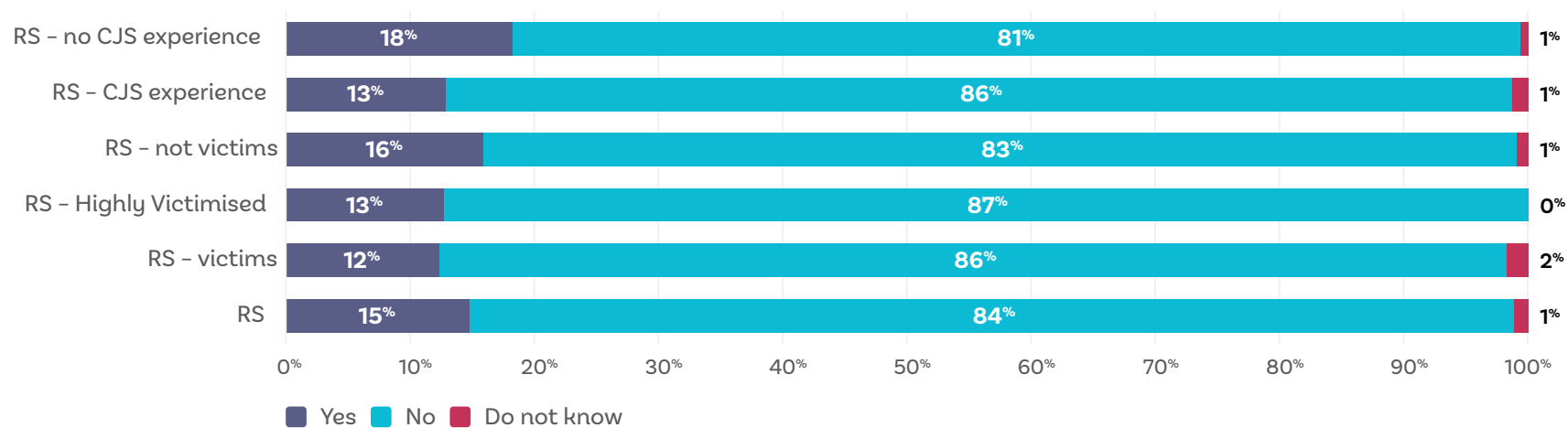
As the random sample survey is using the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey database, we were able to analyse differences in opinions between victims of crime (including highly victimised people reported four or more crime incidents within last 12 months) and those who did not experience crime incidents within last 12 months. We also analysed the difference in opinions between those who earlier interacted with the CJS and those who did not have this experience.

Fig.3 shows that the absolute majority of the random sample survey participants in all subgroups think that current resource allocation in the CJS is not correct. This proportion further increases for victims and those who interacted with the CJS.

Figure 3.

## In your opinion, are we allocating resources in the right way?

(the random sample survey respondents, by victimisation and CJS experience). Note. RS - the random sample survey; OS - the online survey.



Analysis of the random sample survey responses by key demographic groups - gender, age and geographic location - shows that for most groups there is no significant difference in views on resource allocation. We observed only three statistically significant differences:

- Female respondents (12% agreed with current allocation, 87% disagree) vs. male respondents (18% agree, 80% disagree).
- “Other” (i.e. neither Māori nor NZ Europeans) ethnicities - 24% agree with current allocation vs. 15% overall.
- Younger respondents (15 - 29 years of age) - 22% agree with current allocation vs. 15% overall.

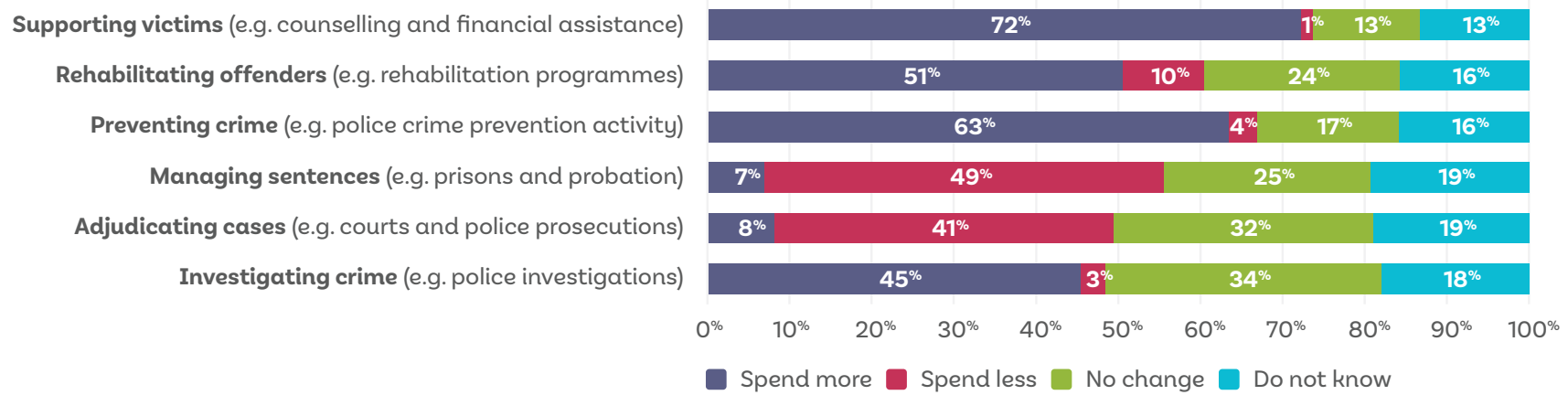
Although these groups demonstrate different results compared from other demographic groups, still a clear majority within these groups supports changes in the current resource allocation.

Further, we asked how respondents would like to change the way money is currently spent across different components of the criminal justice system. While some differences exist between the online survey and the random sample survey respondents, the high-level trends are very similar. Respondents are in favour of spending more on supporting victims (the random sample survey - 72%, the online survey - 78%), preventing crime (the random sample survey - 63%, the online survey - 68%) and offender rehabilitation programmes (the random sample survey - 51%, the online survey - 70%). A relative majority of respondents also support more money for investigating crime (the random sample survey - 45%, the online survey - 39%). On the other hand, a relative majority of respondents are in favour of spending less on managing sentences (the random sample survey - 49%, online survey - 52%) and adjudicating cases (the random sample survey - 41%, online survey - 47%). The results are presented in Fig.4 and Fig.5.



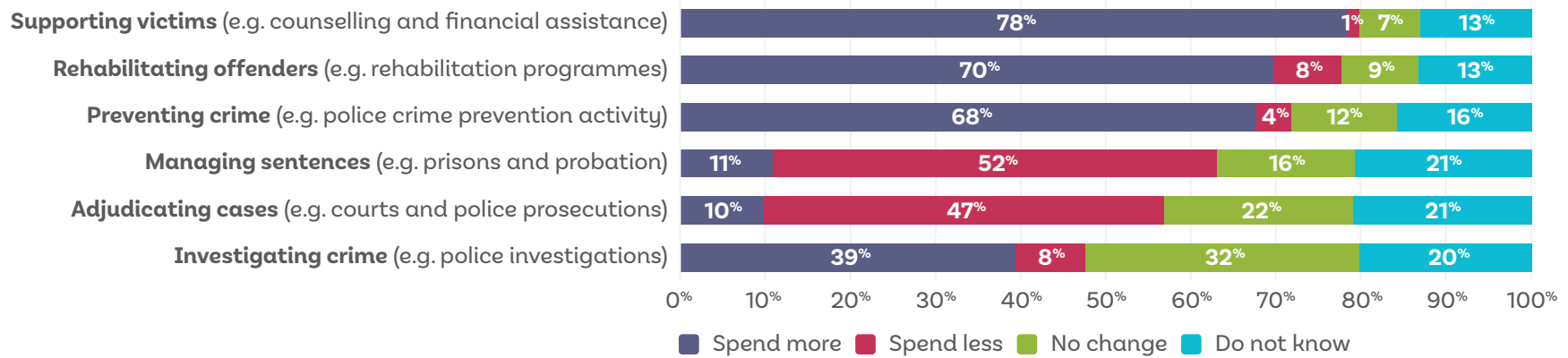
**Figure 4.**

How you would change the way money is spent across the following categories  
(the random sample survey respondents)



**Figure 5.**

How you would change the way money is spent across the following categories  
(the online survey respondents)



## Victims – in the heart of the criminal justice system

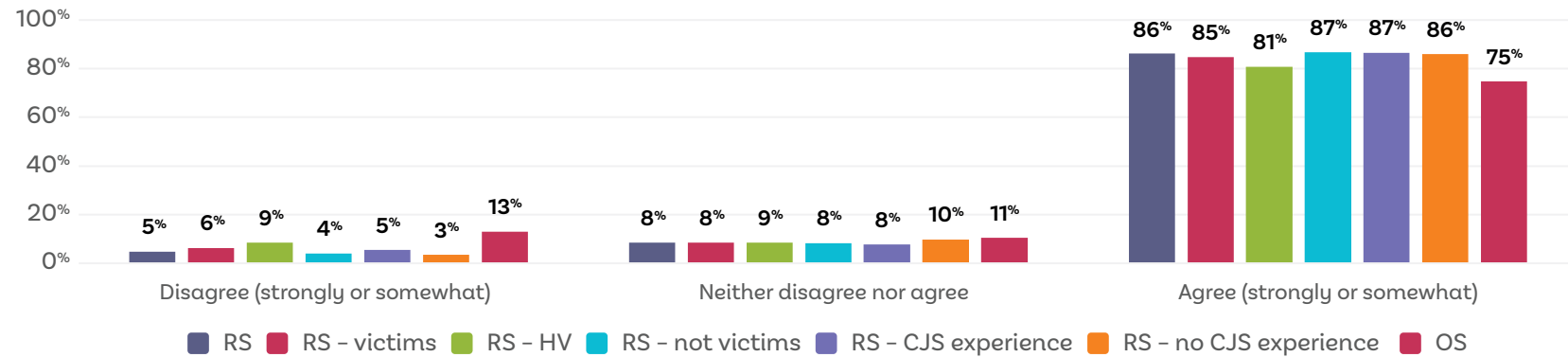
Both surveys clearly show that respondents perceive that victims’ interests should be at the heart of the criminal justice system. 86% of the random sample survey respondents and 75% of the online survey respondents either “completely” or “somewhat” agree with this statement (Fig.6 below).

Interestingly, the proportion of highly victimised people who agreed with this statement is slightly lower than the random sample survey average (81% vs. 86%).

Figure 6.

### Victims’ interests should be at the heart of the criminal justice system

(overall and by victimisation status). Note. RS – the random sample survey; OS – the online survey.

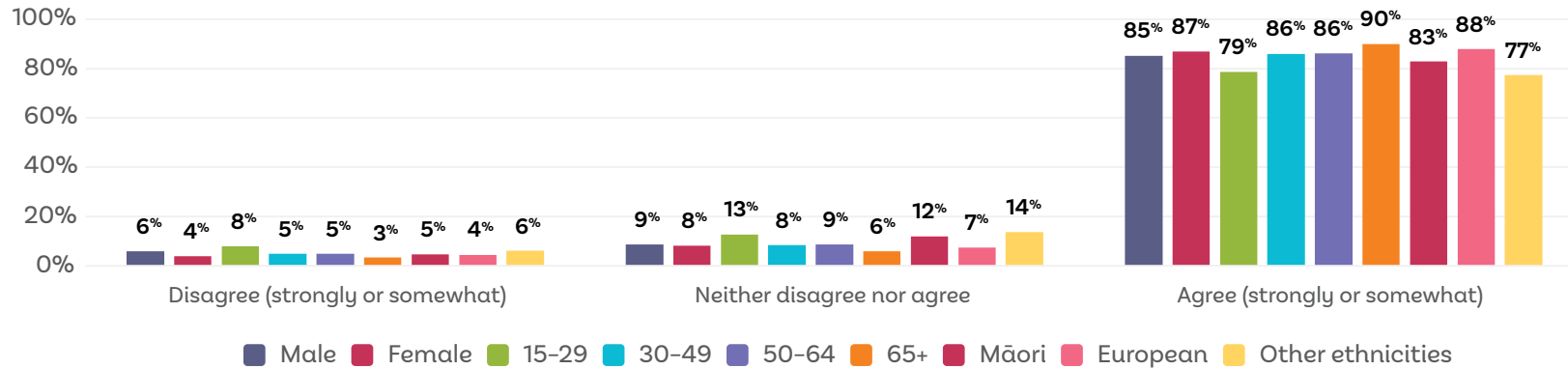


Analysis of the same statement by gender, age and ethnicity (Fig.7 overleaf) shows slightly higher support by elder (65+) people (90%) and slightly lower support by younger (15-29) people (79%) and by ethnic groups other than Māori and NZ Europeans (77%).

Figure 7.

## Victims' interests should be at the heart of the criminal justice system

(the random sample survey - by gender, age groups and ethnicity groups).

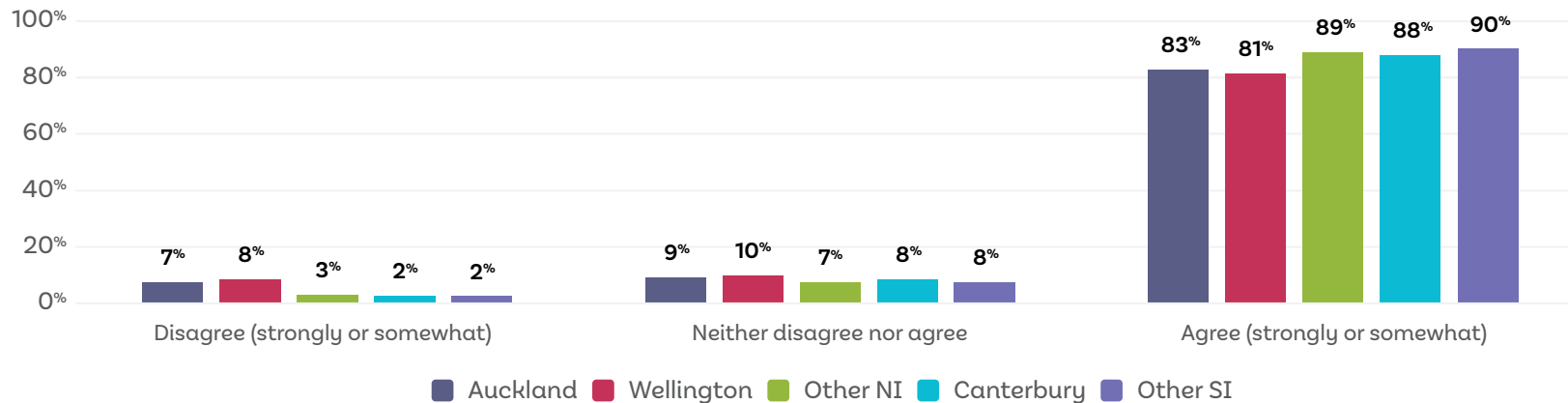


Geographically, support of the statement “Victims’ interest should be in the heart of the criminal justice system” is slightly lower in Wellington and Auckland and slightly higher in the rest of New Zealand. The difference, however, is not substantial (see Fig.8 below).

Figure 8.

## Victims' interests should be at the heart of the criminal justice system

(the random sample survey - by respondents' location).





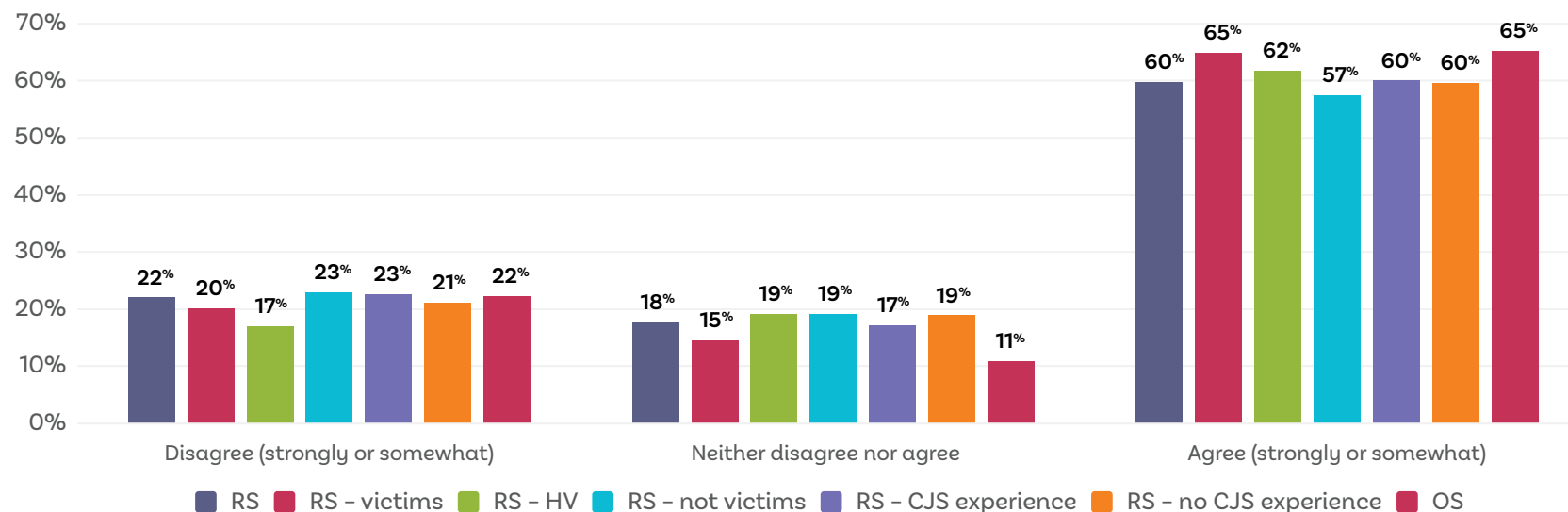
## Māori should lead on solutions for Māori

A majority of respondents agree that Māori should take the lead on solutions to criminal justice issues for Māori. This statement is either “completely” or “somewhat” supported by 60% of the random sample survey respondents and 67% of the online survey respondents (Fig.9).

The highest support of this statement provided by the online survey respondents and by victims of crime responding on the random sample survey (both – 65%). The lowest support (57%) was demonstrated by the non-victim random sample survey respondents.

Figure 9.

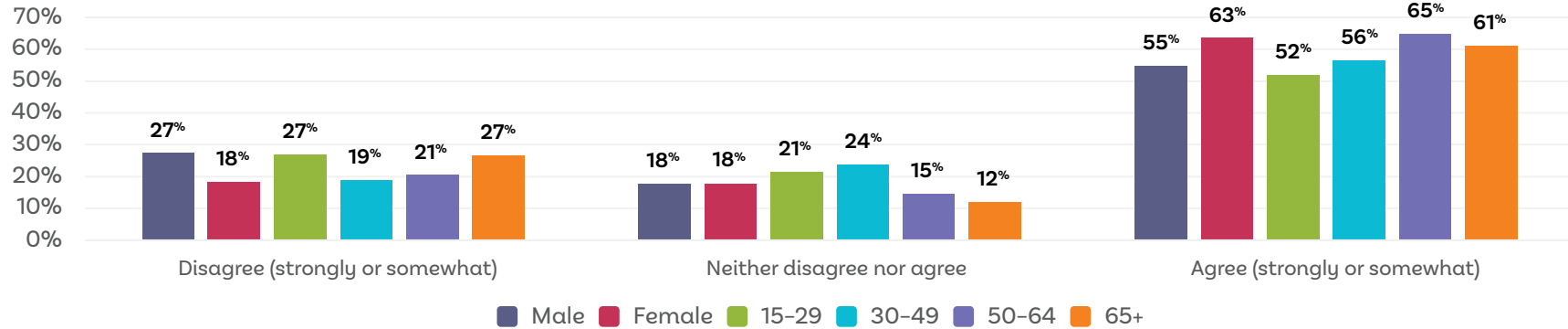
It’s important that Māori take the lead on solutions to criminal justice issues for Māori (overall and by victimisation status). Note. RS - the random sample survey; OS - the online survey.



The above statement received higher support, between 61–65%, from female respondents and from elder people (50–64 and 65+ age groups) while males and younger people (15–29 and 30–49 age groups) demonstrated lower support, between 52–56%. Still the majority in each gender and age group support the statement (see Fig.10).

**Figure 10.**

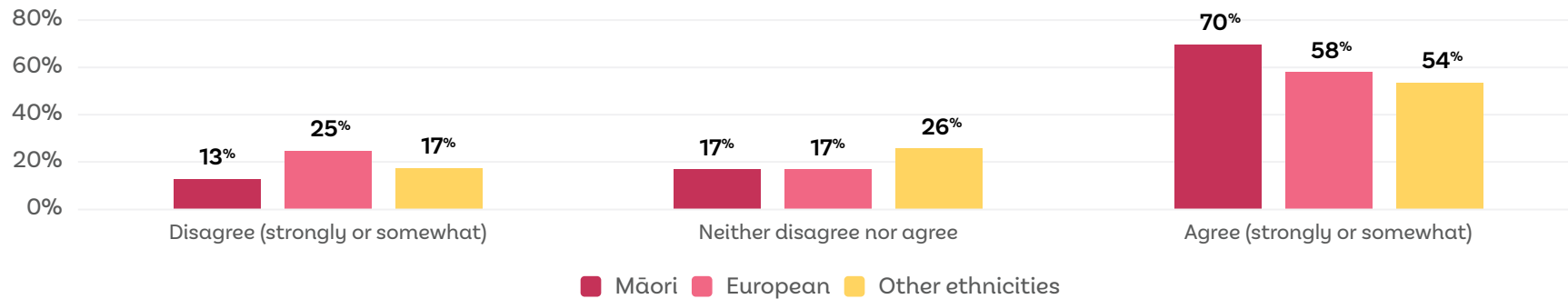
It's important that Māori take the lead on solutions to criminal justice issues for Māori  
(the random sample survey customers by gender and age).



This statement is strongly supported by Māori respondents, see Fig.11.

**Figure 11.**

It's important that Māori take the lead on solutions to criminal justice issues for Māori  
(the random sample survey customers by ethnicity).



Geographically, this statement was more strongly supported in Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury (61-64%) while support in other regions varied between 56-57%.

## Empowering communities to respond

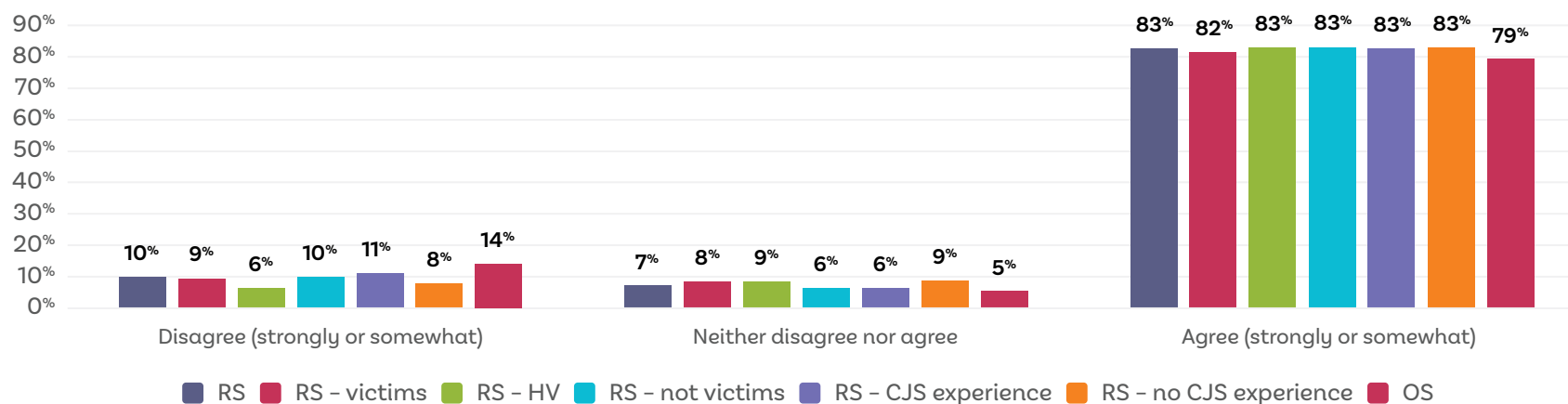
An overwhelming majority of respondents agree “completely” or “somewhat” that less serious offences (e.g. disorderly behaviour) should be dealt with in communities instead of through the formal justice system. This view is supported by 83% of the random sample survey respondents

and 79% of the online survey respondents (Fig.12). No difference was found in the support of this statement by victimisation status or by involvement in the CJS.

Figure 12.

### Less serious offences should be dealt with in communities instead of through the formal justice system

(overall and by victimisation status). Note. RS - the random sample survey; OS - the online survey.



This statement received higher support from females and elder respondents (85–86%) compared to male and younger respondents (76–79%). No difference was recorded between Māori respondents

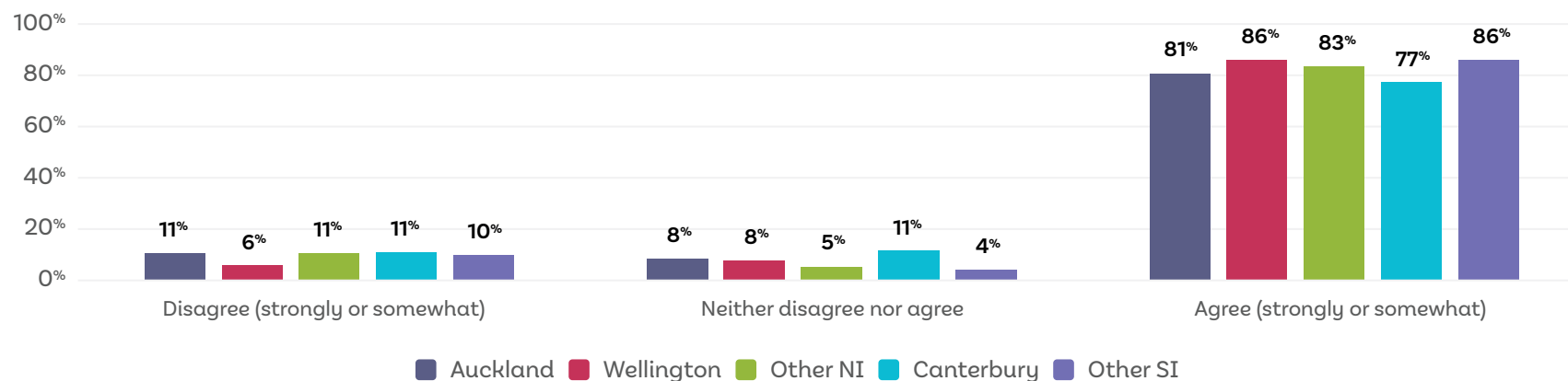
and NZ Europeans. In regard to location (see Fig.13) the lowest support (77%) was recorded in Canterbury while the highest support was found in Wellington and the rest of South Island.



Figure 13.

## Less serious offences should be dealt with in communities instead of through the formal justice system

(the random sample survey respondents by location)



## Why people commit crime – different views

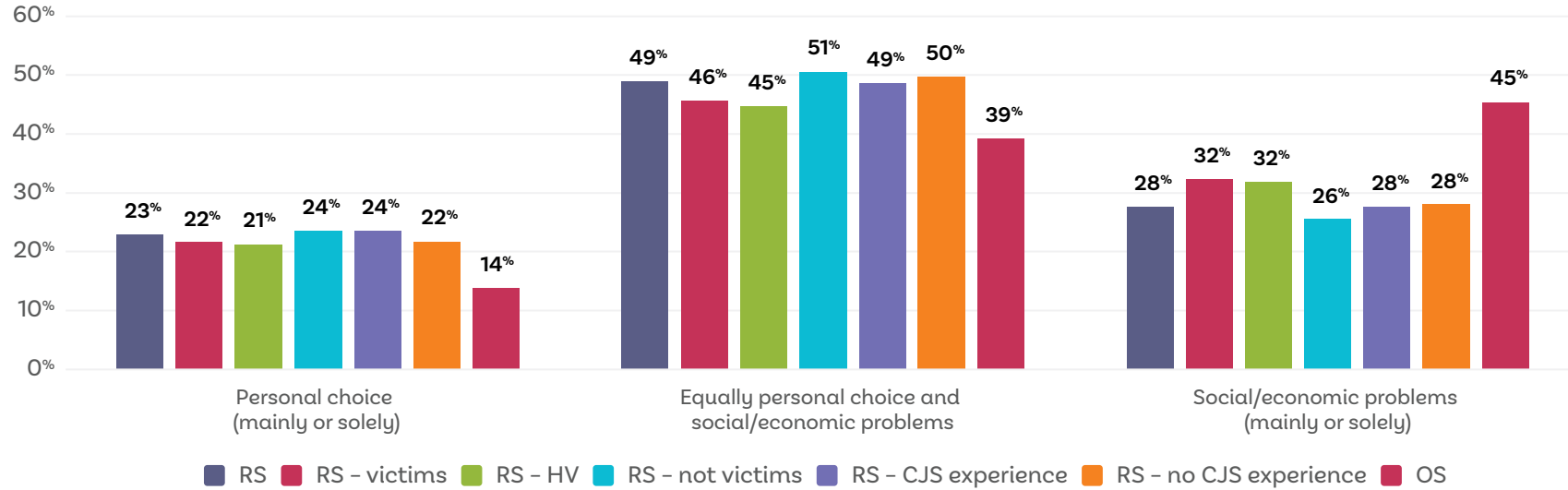
When asked why people commit crime, the random sample survey and the online survey respondents demonstrated notably different views. The answers of the random sample survey respondents are almost equally distributed between personal choice (23%) and social / economic reasons (28%) while nearly half of them (49%) believe that social / economic problems and personal choice are equally driving criminal behaviour. This view is very consistent among victims and non-victims as well as between people with and without CJS experience.

On the other hand, the views of the online survey respondents are clearly shifted towards social / economic problems as a key reason for committing crime. Almost half of the online survey respondents support this view. Another 39% think that social / economic problems and personal choice are equally driving criminal behaviour and only 14% leaning to personal choice as a key driver. See Fig.14 for details.

Figure 14.

## Why do you think people commit crime?

(overall and by victimisation status). Note. RS - the random sample survey; OS - the online survey.

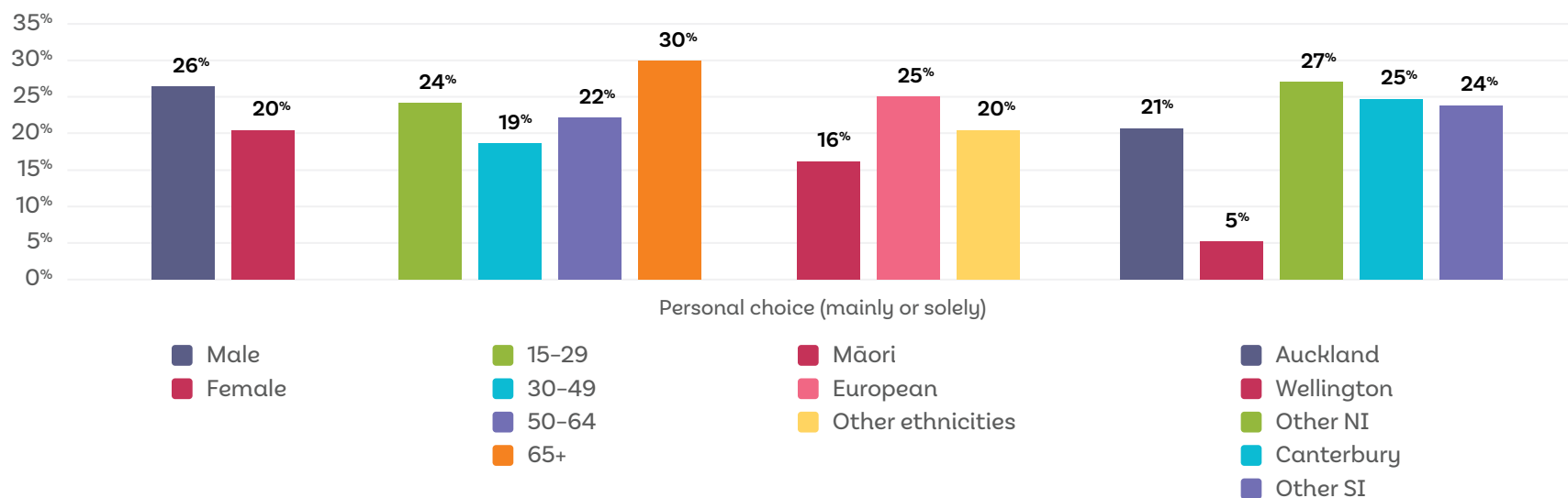


About half (50% +/-4%) of respondents in all demographic and location groups within the random sample survey believe that social / economic problems and personal choice are equally driving criminal behaviour.

The amount of support for the dominance of social / economic problems varies from 22-24% (65+ age group, ethnicities other than Māori and NZ Europeans, and North Island other than Auckland and Wellington) to 30-32% (30-49 age group, Māori, Wellington, Auckland). The support for the dominance of personal choice also varies quite significantly, from 5% (Wellington) to 30% (65+ age group). See Fig.15 for more details.

**Figure 15.**

The random sample survey respondents: people commit crimes mainly or solely due to personal choice.



## Main purpose of a sentence – contrasting opinions

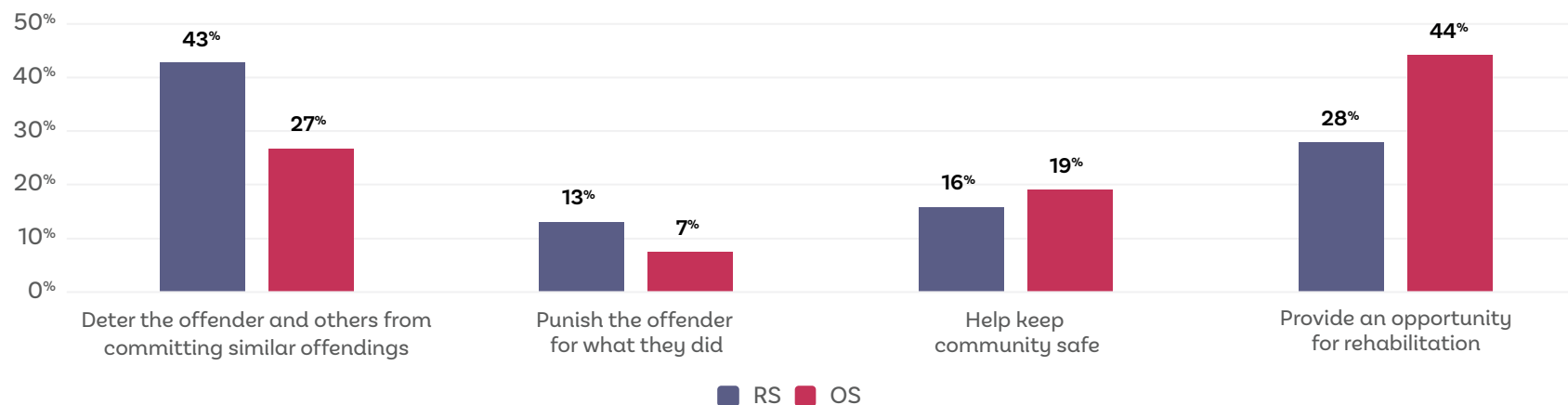
Contrasting opinions were demonstrated when answering the question related to the main purpose of a sentence. Almost half (43%) of the random sample survey respondents believe that the main purpose of a sentence is to deter the offender and others from committing similar offences, while almost half of the online survey respondents (44%) perceive

the main purpose was to provide an opportunity for rehabilitation. However, punishing the offender for what they did was the least popular answer in both groups (13% for the random sample survey and only 7% for the online survey). Fig.16 provides more details.

Figure 16.

## What is the main thing you think this sentence should achieve?

Note. RS - the random sample survey; OS - the online survey.



Within the random sample survey, victimisation status and CJS experience do not make much difference in supporting deterring as a main objective of a sentence (small variance +/-3% from the average level of 43%) and providing opportunities for rehabilitation (also +/-3% from the average of 28%). More diversified and somehow unexpected results were observed for two other suggested goals of sentencing, due to the views of highly victimised people. Only 6% of them, less than half from the average random sample survey level, think that sentence should punish offenders. At the same time, 21% of highly victimised people believe that the key purpose of sentencing is to keep community safe, much higher than other groups of respondents.

There is a significant variety of views about the main purpose of sentencing for different demographic groups within the random sample survey. Here is a brief summary.

- Deter the offenders and others from committing similar offending. The lowest support was observed in Wellington (29%), the highest - in Canterbury (49%). Support from other groups varies from 37% to 47%.
- Punish the offenders for what they did. The lowest support (9%) - from Wellington, the highest (18-19%) from young people (15-29 age group) and ethnicities other than Māori and NZ Europeans. Support from other groups varies insignificantly between 11-14%.
- Help keep community safe. The lowest support (11%) - Canterbury, the highest (20-21%) from young people (15-29 age group) and in Wellington. Support from other groups varies insignificantly between 14-17%.
- Provide an opportunity for rehabilitation. The highest support (40%) - from Wellington. Support from other groups varies between 24-32% (27-29% for most groups).

## Preventing crime – key improvement goal

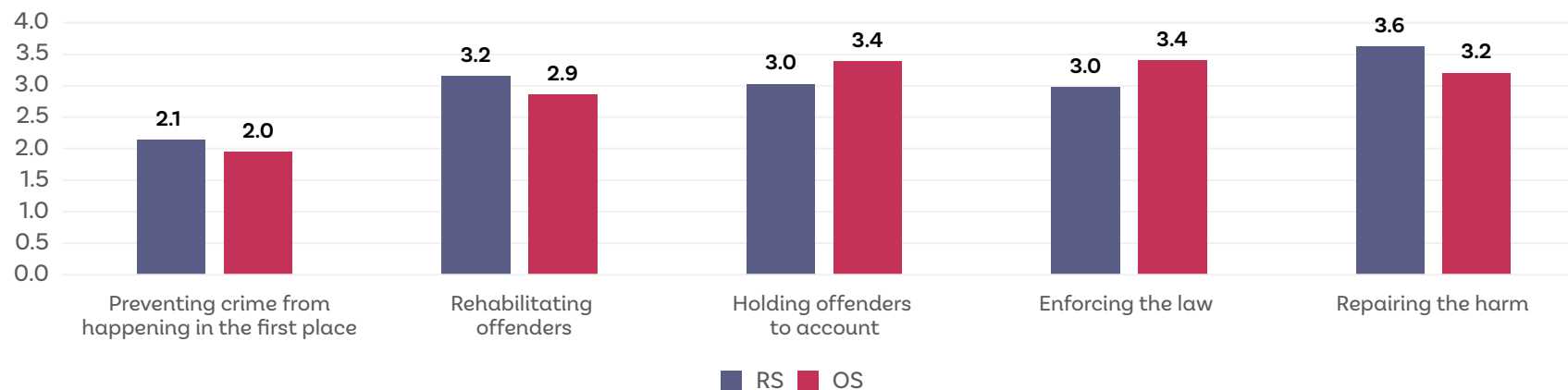
We asked respondents to rank key improvement goals of the criminal justice system such as preventing crime from happening in the first place, rehabilitating offenders, holding offenders to account, enforcing the law and repairing the harm caused by crime. Rank 1 meant the highest priority and rank 5 the lowest.

Both the random sample survey and the online survey respondents gave highest priority to *preventing crime from happening in the first place*. Other goals received reasonably close average ranks between 2.9 and 3.6 with the random sample survey respondents giving slightly higher priority to *enforcing the law* and *holding offenders to account* while the online survey respondents gave higher priority to *rehabilitating offenders* and *repairing the harm* (see Fig.17).

Figure 17.

### What do you think the criminal justice system should mainly focus on?

Note. RS - the random sample survey; OS - the online survey.



No significant variance was observed within different random sample survey victimisation status and CJS experience groups. With regard to demography and location, the only fact worth mentioning is the higher rank given to *holding offenders to account* by younger people (15–29 age group).

## Main sources of information – still TV and newspapers

Finally, we asked respondents to choose their three main sources of information about crime from a long list of potential sources. The answers show that newspapers, either hard copy or online editions, continue to be the main source of crime-related information for both groups (selected by 56% of the random sample survey respondents and 44% of the online survey respondents).

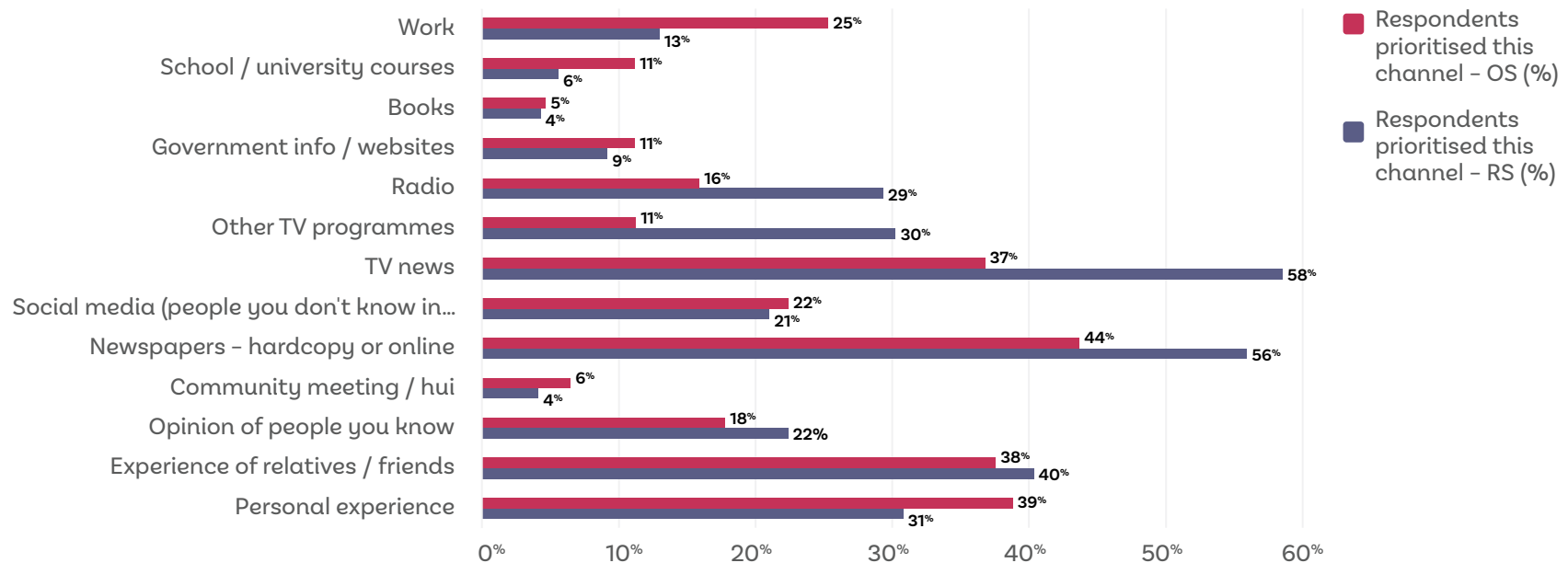
However, usage priority of other information channels for the two groups is different. For the random sample survey respondents, the other major

sources of crime related information are TV news (58%) and experience of people they know (40%), while for the online survey respondents the other highest sources of information are personal experience (39%), experience of relatives / friends (38%), and only then TV news (37%). These answers suggest that either personal experience or experience of friends or relatives may be one of key drivers for participating in the online survey. Fig.18 provides more details.

Figure 18.

Select the top three things that inform your opinions about crime in New Zealand.

Note. RS - the random sample survey; OS - the online survey.







Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa