

# Ten Criminal Justice Stories That Need Telling

*Some guiding questions that underlie all of these are: How does power function here (who has it, who doesn't, who gains, and who loses if things change)? Who are the stakeholders? Who is fighting for change, and how? Whose perspectives are absent, what changes if they are included?*

## 1. Crime Survivors' Perspectives on Police, Prisons, and Justice Reform

Our stories about crime survivors are artificially monolithic and therefore inaccurate. We need more stories about who they are, what they want, how they experience the criminal justice system, where their interests diverge from police and prosecutors and what happens to them when they do, inequities in victims compensation, and why so many survivors are (or are becoming) abolitionists.

## 2. How to Understand the Rise in Gun Violence and What to Do About It

Reporting on crime trends vastly overrelies on law enforcement sources to make meaning of trends and fails to put those trends in the larger social context, including what is still under-reported and why, what is driving violence, what other than policing is working to reduce violence (and what things would look like without those interventions), and what adverse roles policing and incarceration have in producing (or failing to quell) rises in violence.

## 3. Solutions to Violence: Where They Are and How to Grow Them

Stories about violence too often presume the only solution to it is more enforcement, when in fact there are a vast array of long-standing, often grassroots, solutions that already address violence effectively and could do far more with more resources, including violence interrupters, restorative justice, community-based healing and grief work, alternatives to 911, alternatives to incarceration, and other public health approaches to harm.

## 4. Why Prisons Are Failing to Produce Safety and What That Should Mean for Sentencing Policy

Prison has been widely demonstrated in the research to be criminogenic, and yet the fact that our nation's primary response to violence is productive of violence is almost never treated as the scandalous news that it should be; we need stories that explore prison's failure to produce safety, the underlying flaws in its design and theory of change, and the assignment of responsibility for that failure not only to corrections systems, but to the policing, prosecuting, and court systems that put people in prison in the first place.

## 5. Voting Rights, Gerrymandering, and the Future of Democracy

Where incarcerated people are counted and how (i.e. the address where they are incarcerated or the address where they lived at the time of their arrest) underlies the shape of nearly every state's electoral map, the size of its districts, and the results of its elections; how and to what degree people are disenfranchised for their contact with the criminal justice system has an enormous effect on the number and demographics of eligible voters (as the Amendment 4 campaign in Florida demonstrated) and the outcomes of elections.

## 6. The Danger of Gangs Databases

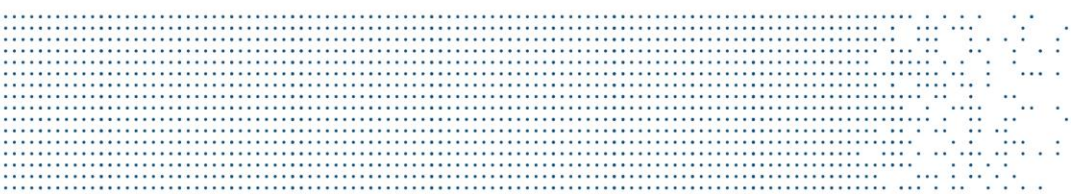
Gangs databases affect arrests, bail determinations, charging, and sentencing, all in ways that are racially disparate, and yet are subject to almost no scrutiny, oversight, or governance, as people can be added to them for virtually any reason, are not informed of their inclusion, are virtually never removed, and cannot challenge their inclusion despite the lifelong consequences it may have.

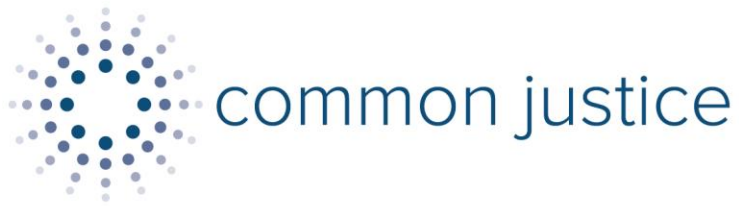
## 7. What are District Attorneys' Associations and Why Are They So Powerful?

While a great deal of attention has been (finally) paid to the immense power of prosecutors in determining the outcomes of criminal cases, far less has been paid to the outsized influence of prosecutors' associations in the legislative processes, which can distort policy away from a public mandate for reform and entrench existing inequities and an overreliance on punishment.

## 8. What Is Prison Abolition, and Why Is It Rising in Popularity?

The abolition of prison is increasingly the subject of mainstream consideration, but there is insufficient reporting about what it actually means and would entail, what the rise of its popularity means for criminal justice reform efforts, and why so many people—including people who have been harmed—are adopting this position as a way to keep people safe.





## 9. Prisons and Jails in Rural America

Too often incarceration gets talked about as a fundamentally urban problem, but as criminal justice reform advances, a greater portion of those incarcerated are from rural communities where far fewer programs exist and the drivers of crime and incarceration are far less understood, even though these trends have huge implications for the future of mass incarceration, the privatization of prisons, and the composition of the electorate.

## 10. Long Sentences and the Aging of America's Incarcerated People

As a nation, the United States sentences people to unusually long periods of incarceration, one result of which is the growing number of elderly people behind bars. This story is under-reported and, when elevated, corrects broadly held misperceptions about who is incarcerated, elevates the issue of medical care in prisons, challenges notions of danger, and raises the basic question of mercy, even for those who have caused harm.

