Plea Bargaining: Benefits and Drawbacks

A plea bargain is a contract with the state. Generally, a defendant who enters into a plea bargain agrees to plead guilty to a lesser crime (receiving a lesser sentence as a result) rather than go to trial for a more serious charge that carries the possibility of a harsher sentence if he or she is found guilty. The defendant may also be offered a reduced sentence in exchange for information about another illegal act or guilty individual. Roughly 90 percent of criminal cases end in plea bargains.

1. Based on this information, what are the benefits, if any, of plea bargaining for:

   Prosecutors

   Defendants

   Victims of crime

   Society

2. What are the drawbacks, if any, of plea bargaining for:

   Prosecutors

   Defendants

   Victims of crime

   Society