

Winning the Narrative on Safety, Accountability, and Justice:

Leading with solutions, not scare tactics

Vera ACTION

PHILANDRO CASTILE
SANDRA BLAND
TERENCE GRUTCHER
ERIC GARNER
MICHAEL BROWN
SEAN BELL
TAMIR RICE
FREDDY GRAY
DANROY HENRY
OSCAR GRANT
KENDRIC McDADE
AIYANA JONES
ANGELO CROOMS...

ADAM...
JOHN NEVILLE

NO
MORE
NAMES

TRAYVON MARTIN...
BREDONNA TAYLOR
RAMARLEY GRAHAM
JOHN CRAWFORD
AHMED ABREY
JONATHAN FERRELL
BILLY HUGHES
JASON PERO
DANIEL PRUDE
WILLIAM GREEN
VINCENT BELMONTE
ANGELO CROOMS
PATRICK LYNN WARREN
RAYSHARD BROOKS...

CARSON

BLACK

IGN

Record-High 56% in U.S. Perceive Local Crime Has Increased

BY MEGAN BRENNAN

GALLUP®

Annual crime report shows Californians' fear of increasing crime is justified

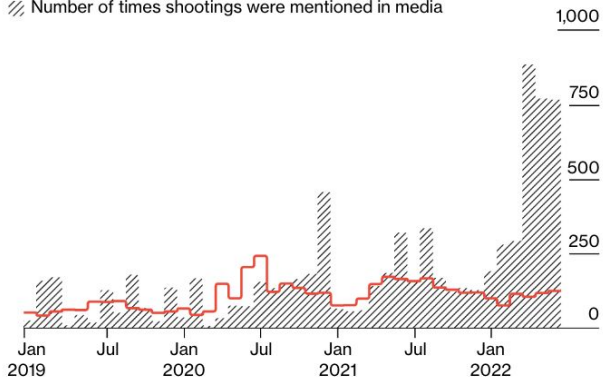
BY DAN WALTERS
JULY 9, 2022



Media Mismatch

Coverage about shootings outweigh the number of incidents

■ Number of shootings
▨ Number of times shootings were mentioned in media



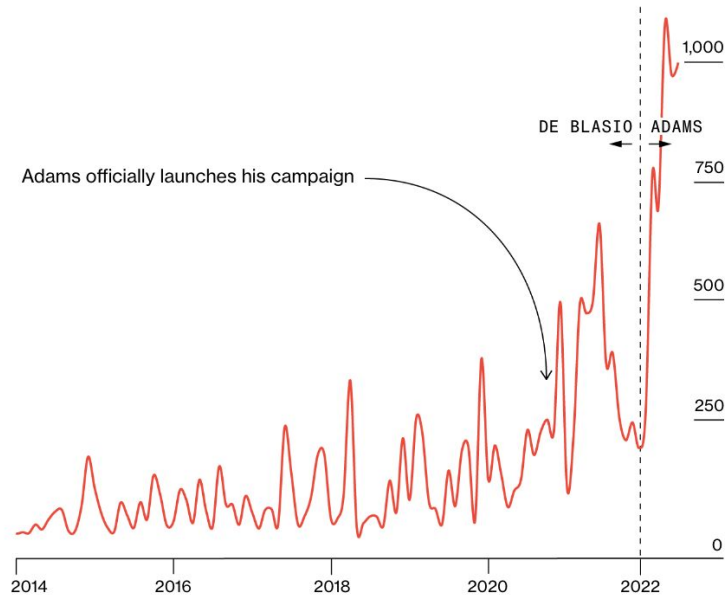
Note: Monthly media mentions of shootings are localized to NYC print and digital media headlines. Sources: New York City Police Department, Media Cloud

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- 56% say there is more crime where they live, up five points
- 78% think there is more crime in the U.S.
- Worry about being victim of six crimes up significantly from 2021

Sounding Alarms

Digital and print media mentions of violent crime surged after Mayor Adams was elected



Note: Monthly mentions of "violent crime" includes assault, homicide, shootings and guns localized to NYC print and digital media headlines. Source: Media Cloud

House Democrats pass police funding bills despite divisions

By FARNOUSH AMIRI September 23, 2022



ELECTIONS
Midterm voters key in on crime
Crime and public safety are proving to be a potent mix of issues in the midterm election.



More than half of respondents blamed the spike in crime on "too many guns on our streets," 5 points more than the share of voters who said that "defunding of police departments" was a major reason. | Drew Angerer/Getty Images

The reason Republican attacks on crime are so potent

The party's closing argument is exploiting voters' fears.

Democrats Worry as G.O.P. Attack Ads Take a Toll in Wisconsin

Mandela Barnes, the party's Senate candidate, is now wobbling in his race against Ron Johnson, the Republican incumbent. Democratic nominees in other states face similar challenges.

Share full article 393

Bloomberg the Company & Its Products | Bloomberg Terminal Demo Request | Bloomberg Anywhere Remote Login | Bloomberg Customer Support

Bloomberg US Edition Sign In

Live Now Markets Economics Industries Technology Politics Wealth Pursuits Opinion Businessweek Equality Green **CityLab**

CityLab Justice

GOP Seizes On Bail Reform as Weapon to Bash Democrats on Crime

Public safety fears have taken center stage in the New York and Illinois govern

Americans' Satisfaction With the State of the Nation in Different Areas

Figures are the percentage very/somewhat satisfied

	2020	2021	2022
	%	%	%
Aspects of U.S. life			
The availability of affordable healthcare	37	34	35
The level of immigration into the country today	35	39	34
The state of the nation's economy	68	43	33
The amount Americans pay in federal taxes	37	36	31
The nation's policies regarding the abortion issue	32	33	24
The nation's policies to reduce or control crime	47	27	24
The nation's efforts to deal with poverty and homelessness	22	18	21

Safety is too important an issue to be politicized, yet it always is. Conventional wisdom in the media and among the political class on what communities think about crime is wrong. We need to win the politics on crime to pass policy change for safety, accountability, and justice.

The True Line strategy

Using comprehensive, robust public opinion research and message testing to advance a new line and change the political, media, and cultural narrative about safety, accountability, and justice.

- **501c3 field coordination:**
25+ national organizations meet biweekly to share messaging research and strategy.
- **501c4 political outreach:**
Conduct briefings and provide messaging guidance to politicians, GOTV, PACs, and funders.
- **501c3 media outreach:**
Provide expertise to journalists who cover crime, politics, and criminal justice.
- **501c3 social influencer strategy:**
Engage influential messengers online to reach moveable audiences.

Public opinion research and polling

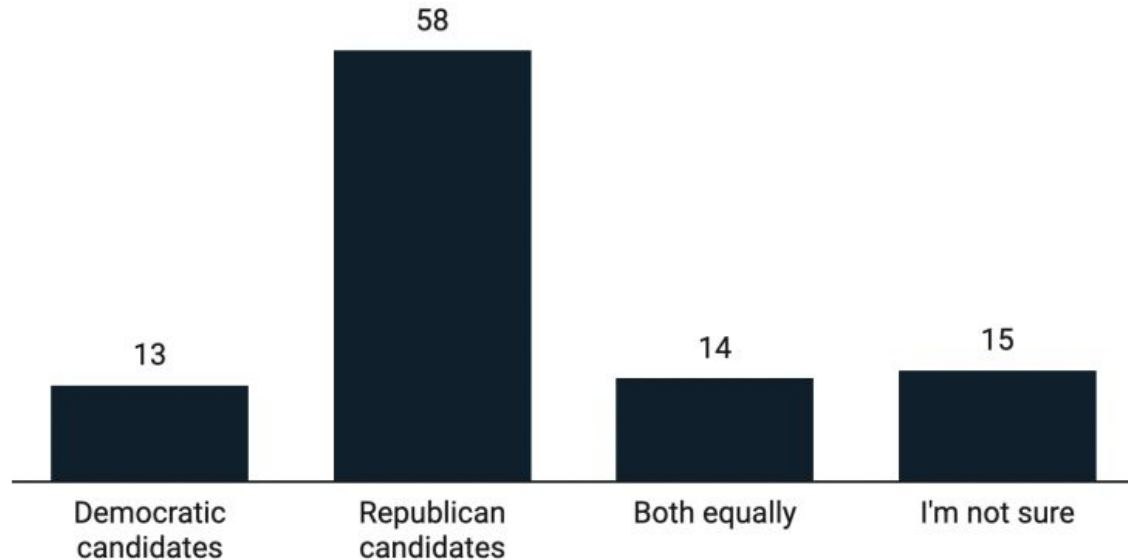
- **Round 1:** qualitative research in late fall 2021 of 100 “moveable middle” likely voters and tested messages in Swayable in January 2022 with over 10,500 respondents nationally.
- **Round 2:** national quantitative poll in June 2022 of almost 4,000 likely voters, with oversampling in 11 battleground states.
- **Round 3:** national online exit survey on election night of 1,800 actual voters and a second post-election quantitative survey of 2,100 actual midterm voters in 7 battleground states (AZ, FL, GA, MI, NC, PA, WI).
- **Round 4:** updated national survey in April 2023 of 2,800 registered voters, oversampling Black, Latino/a, and AAPI voters on inoculation messages.
- **Round 5:** exit surveys of actual voters in the Chicago mayoral runoff (April 2023), and the Philadelphia mayoral primary race (May 2023). (AZ, FL, GA, MI, NC, PA, WI).
- **Round 6:** national quantitative poll in September 2023 of almost 2,500 likely voters, with oversampling of Black, Latino/a, and AAPI respondents.

A FEW FRAMING THOUGHTS:

While the “tough on crime” message is louder than “serious about safety,” communities don’t want to choose between safety and justice—they believe we can have and deserve both.

The Republican advantage on crime is one of volume—by almost 50 points over Democrats in 2022 battleground states.

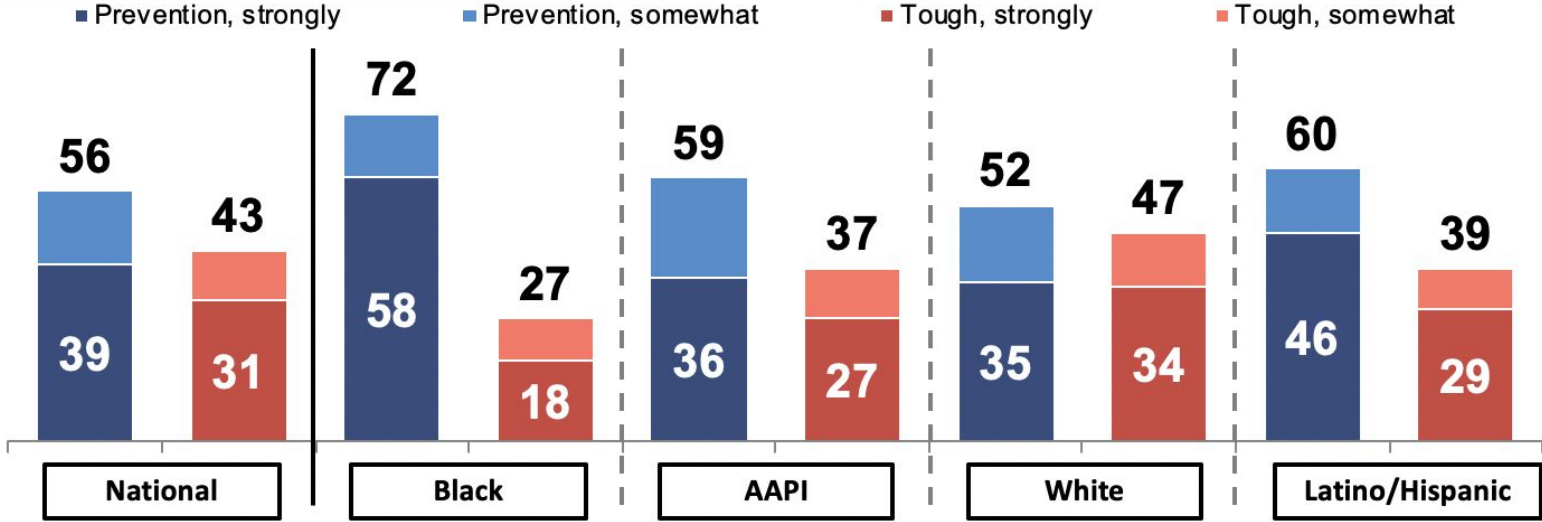
In the campaigns this year, who did you hear from more on the issue of crime?



However, a message about making communities safe performs better than a narrow “tough-on-crime” one.

(COMPREHENSIVE PREVENTION) Fully fund things that are proven to create safe communities and improve people’s quality of life, like good schools, a living wage, and affordable housing, and do more to prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and getting illegal guns of the street.

(NARROW TOUGH ON CRIME) Doing more to get tough on crime, like having tougher sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep potentially dangerous people in jail, and providing police more support and resources.

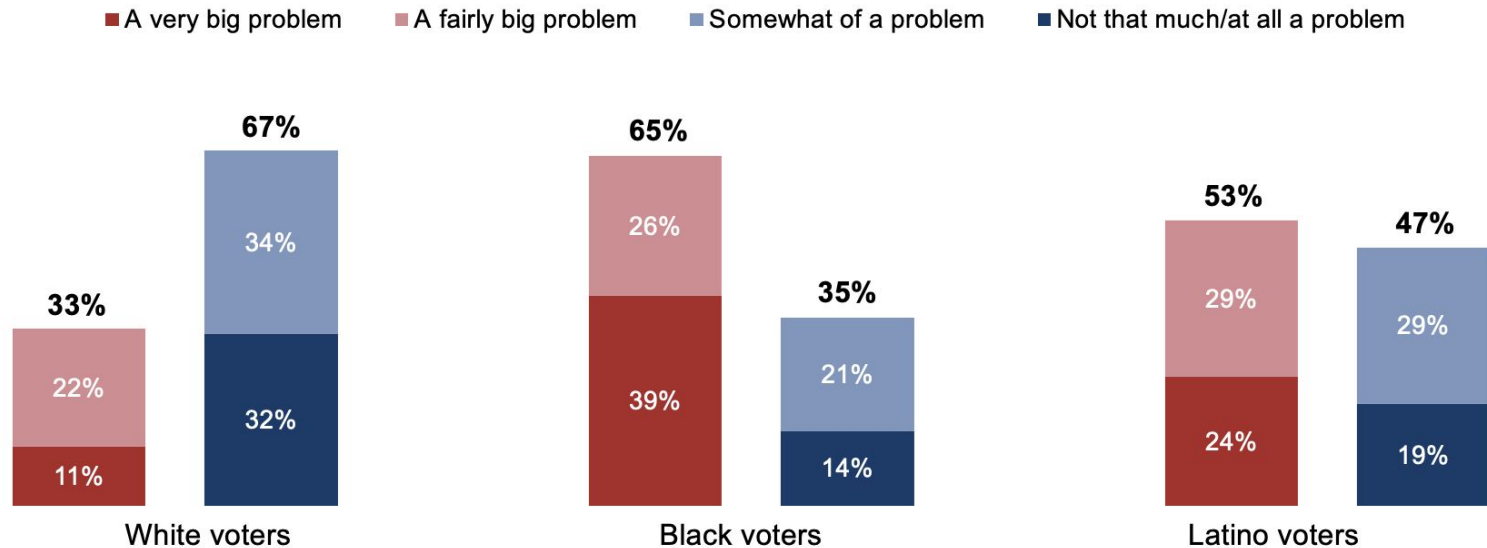


TAKEAWAY 1.

Getting off the opposition's narrative playing field and onto our own is a racial justice priority.

Preventing crime and delivering safety is a priority for everyone, but especially for Black communities.

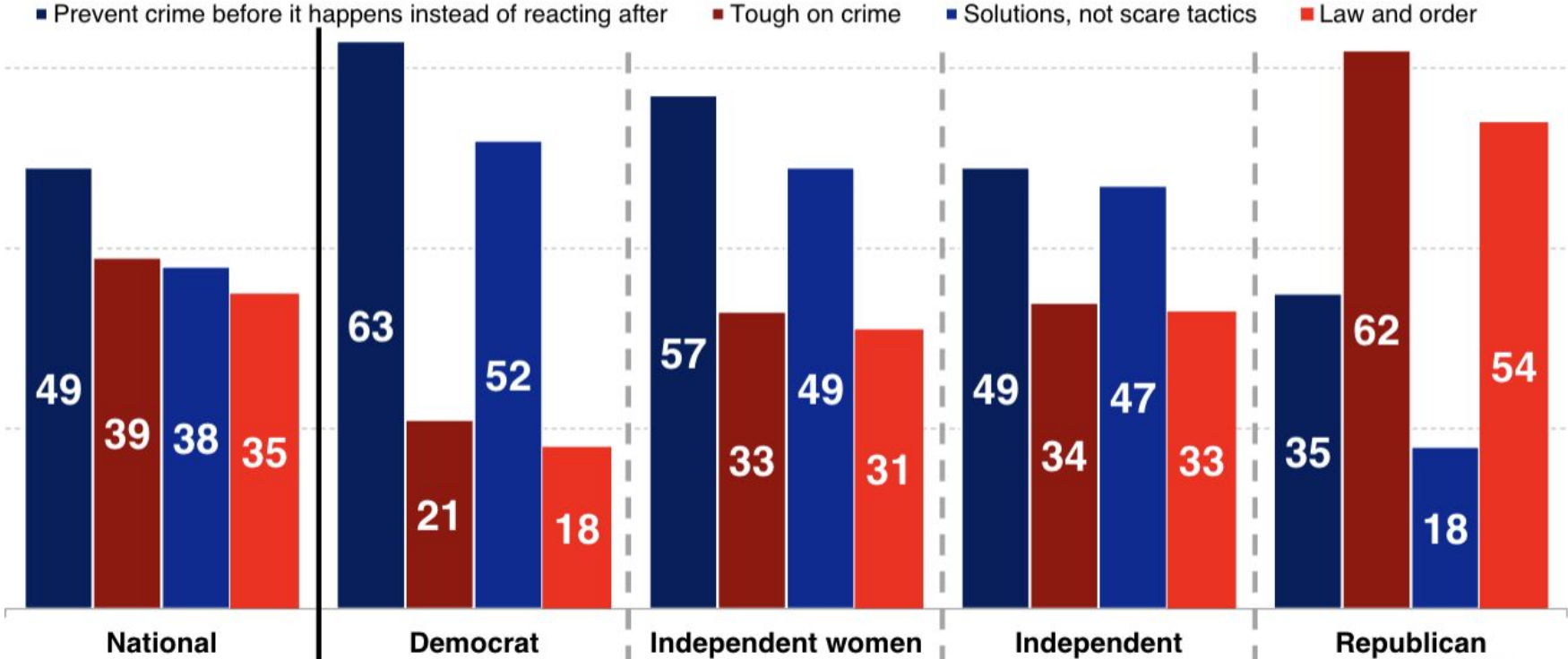
How big a problem is crime **where you live**?



TAKEAWAY 2.

Unexpected demographics favor a comprehensive approach to safety over “tough on crime” –including independent voters, especially moderate women.

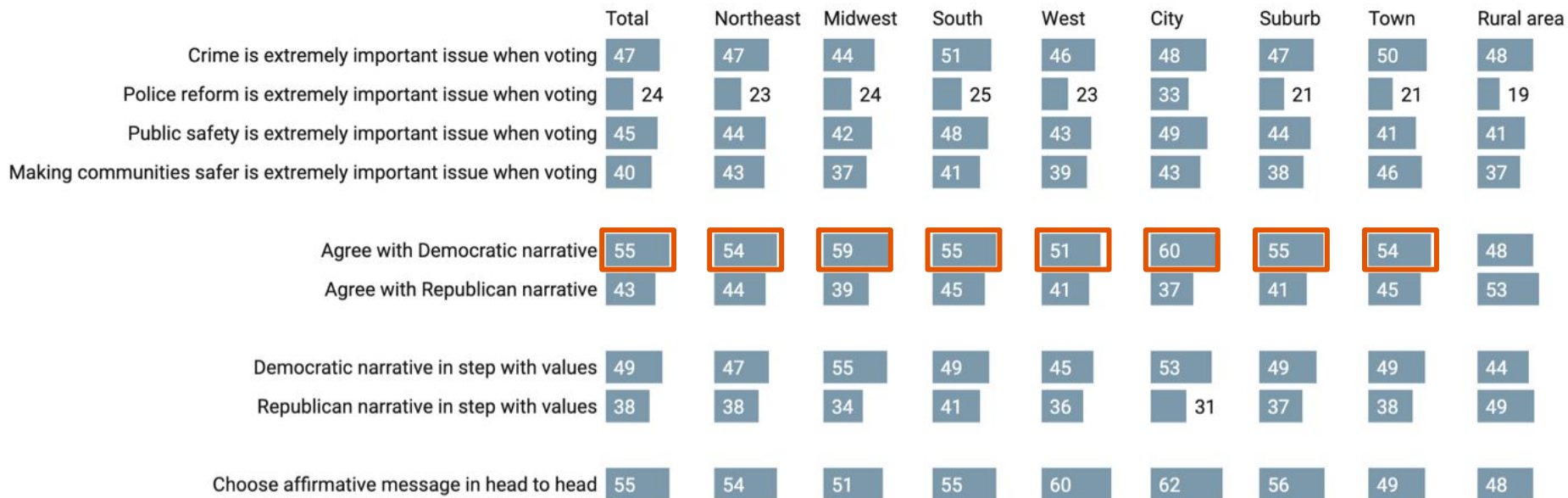
Even among independent voters, especially women, a comprehensive approach beats out “tough on crime.”



TAKEAWAY 3.

A comprehensive approach to safety holds up across geographies and different parts of the country.

Support for a comprehensive approach to safety outperforms “tough on crime” across the board – except in rural areas.



TAKEAWAY 4.

There is a way to talk about the police—and it's about better policing, not *more* policing.

Support for police is strong, but so is support for accountability.

89%

agree

59%

strongly

We can support police officers who put their lives on the line for us every day and we can hold police accountable if they use excessive force or abuse their power.

A message of supporting police *and* holding them accountable is the strongest – 20 points better than just adding more police.

When it comes to police, how interested would you have been in hearing Democrats talk about...

RANDOMIZE

Very interested Somewhat interested



TAKEAWAY 5.

Meeting a “defund” attack with a message of “support and accountability” inoculates and turns the conversation onto our own narrative playing field.

A comprehensive solutions message even inoculates against and outperforms a scare tactic “defund” attack.

Next are two statements from two different candidates running for US House of Representatives. **Which do you agree with more, even if neither is quite right in your view?**

Candidate A: The Left has allowed a culture built on hating the police to drive decisions surrounding law enforcement. The Defund the Police movement is without a doubt one of the greatest dangers to public safety in our nation’s history, and Democrats are responsible for it. The hostile climate for police has discouraged proactive police work. We can’t expect the police to keep us safe if we aren’t willing to keep them safe.

42%

Candidate B: I’m not about scare tactics or slogans, and I’m not afraid to have an honest conversation. We keep expecting police to solve every social problem, from kids skipping school to mental illness to homelessness to gun violence. No one profession can do that. We’re spending \$115 billion a year and putting too much on police departments. It’s time to try out some promising new solutions to lift the burden. It’s time for support and change, not blame.

58%

TAKEAWAY 6.

We have to own accountability, but accountability goes both ways.

When it comes to accountability, most people hold the government responsible for a criminal justice system that works.

90%

agree

63%

strongly

We need more accountability at all levels. The criminal justice system needs to be more accountable for public safety and fairness. There needs to be accountability for people who break the law. Police should be held accountable for excessive force. Elected officials need to be accountable to voters when they spend billions on things that don't work.

TAKEAWAY 7.

Communities believe in the policies we champion.

As a matter of policy, voters favor comprehensive solutions for safety and preventing crime over “tough-on-crime” ones.

Let's say we want to improve safety in communities. Which of these solutions is effective?

More likely to be seen as effective:

- Working across party lines toward a common goal of safe communities (63%)
- Increasing access to mental health care (61%)
- Building trust between police and the community (61%)
- Making sure public safety, not wealth, determines who stays in jail pending trial (57%)
- Addressing underlying economic conditions (56%)

Less likely to be seen as effective:

- Harsher sentences and mandatory minimums to keep people in prison (38%)
- Putting 100,000 more police on the ground to improve safety (43%)

TAKEAWAY 8.

When we turn the conversation from “tough on crime” to “serious about safety,” we win real policy change and inoculate against backlash.

Illinois 'on right side of history'

By SHIA KAPOS | 09/18/2023 08:06 AM EDT

Presented by the Save My Scholarship Coalition

Happy Monday, Illinois. Thanks for waking up with Illinois Playbook.

TOP TALKER

IT'S A HISTORIC DAY for Illinois as it becomes the first state to wipe out the cash bail system that has disproportionately kept poor people — especially Black and Latino defendants — in jail for months as they await trial.

The change, signed into law earlier this year by Gov **JB Pritzker**, has been years in the works.

“This is a new era for Illinois and, today, we stand on the right side of history,” Cook County State’s Attorney **Kim Foxx** told Playbook.



TAKEAWAY 9.

When we turn the conversation from “tough on crime” to “serious about safety,” we even win on the politics.

Jacksonville, FL mayoral

STATE Davis, Deegan trade barbs over crime, JEA during televised debate | What you need to know

 **Hanna Holthaus**
Florida Times-Union

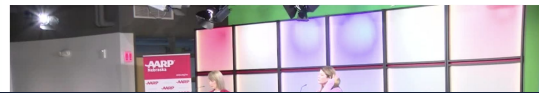
Published 11:13 p.m. ET April 20, 2023 | Updated 10:43 a.m. ET April 21, 2023

Lincoln, NE mayoral

Political ads spark clash over Lincoln crime statistics

Gaylor Baird and Geist trade barbs over crime and more in Lincoln mayoral debate

April 23, 2023 10:20 pm by McKenzie Johnson



Fetterman's clemency crusade draws soft-on-crime attacks from Oz in Pennsylvania Senate race

Mehmet Oz and his GOP allies have run with a series of ads and messaging that strips context from the cases Lt. Gov. John Fetterman has championed as head of the state pardons board.

Trading barbs throughout the night, the two candidates for Jacksonville mayor shared a stage one-on-one for the first time Thursday night, distinguishing themselves on their approaches to crime and their visions for the future of city politics.

Democrat Donna Deegan continued to speak on her campaign of change and against her opponent's connections to the current mayor's office.

Republican Daniel Davis stuck to his tough on crime platform and related a number of questions back to the city's rising crime rate.

Exit polls show who voted for Fetterman, Oz in US Senate race

Pennsylvania U.S. Senate

- 37% said abortion was the issue that mattered most in deciding how they voted. Of those voters, 78% voted for Fetterman and 21% voted for Oz.
- 28% said inflation was the most important issue. Of those voters, 27% chose Fetterman and 72% chose Oz.
- 11% said crime was the most important. Of those voters, 51% voted for Fetterman and 49% voted for Oz.

TAKEAWAY 10.

There are tried-and-tested messaging tips to win the narrative about safety, accountability, and justice on our own terms.

The right messaging frame for safety, accountability, and justice

1. **Lead with the shared value of safety.**

Acknowledge the importance of safety for everyone and say that we deserve an honest conversation based in solutions, not scare tactics, about what makes communities safe. Everyone can walk with us through the safety door to get to justice.

2. **“Tough on crime” is the villain that keeps us from real safety.**

Across the political spectrum, people do not believe the “tough-on-crime” approach to crime and safety is working. If it were, we would be the safest country in the world.

3. **Rely on empathy, not simply data, to persuade.**

Countering falsely-held beliefs with empathy is more persuasive than contradicting with data. Arguing about crime statistics, for example, with legislators or the public is often not effective. Setting the record straight with journalists and media is, though.

4. **Pivot to solutions.**

There is strong support for community-based solutions to preventing crime and delivering safety. Highlight specific programs—how they work, who they serve, and the impact they have. This is where the data is persuasive.

For questions, please contact:

Insha Rahman, irahman@veraaction.org
Director, Vera Action

Michelle Parris, mparris@vera.org
Director, Vera California

Brian Tashman, btashman@veraaction.org
Deputy Director, Vera Action