

Winning the Narrative on Safety, Accountability, and Justice:

Leading with solutions, not scare tactics

What do we mean by “scare tactics” on crime? The following video is a classic example of this rhetoric.

“Scare tactics”



Many find this rhetoric effective because it taps into a fundamental emotion around safety—which is fear.

**Here is a different approach to
talking about crime and
safety—one that is based on
hope, optimism, and solutions.**

“Solutions”



GOVERNOR
KATHY HOCHUL

**Weaponizing fears about safety
is a familiar playbook. Yet
conventional wisdom on how
people react to messages about
crime is wrong.**

When comparing the two messaging approaches head-to-head, solutions outperform the scare tactics.

% Agree with more

Statement A Statement B

Democrats' pro-criminal, anti-police agenda has created prosecutors who would rather let a dangerous criminal walk out of jail than enforce the law. And their insistence on eliminating cash bail has led to a revolving-door criminal justice system where offenders—even violent offenders—are released back to the streets where police officers are discouraged from making arrests. Democrats want to defund police and create chaos across the U.S. and we need to vote them out to keep us safe

A safe walk home at night. A bus ride free of fear. A safer state for every child. That's what I'm working for. I want to pass a comprehensive crime plan to make it happen. My plan goes after illegal guns to make our neighborhoods safer, increases street lighting, partners with law enforcement to build trust with the community, and gets help for the homeless and those suffering with mental illness. You deserve to feel safe, and I won't stop working until you do. *Base n = 680*



**The most effective messages lead
with solutions, not scare tactics.
They touch upon three core
values – safety, accountability,
and justice.**

Public opinion research and surveys referenced in this deck

Over 18 months, we conducted four rounds of research to understand what matters about safety, accountability, and justice to different audiences:

- *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*: qualitative survey of 69 Americans, with oversampling of Black and Latino/a respondents, on their perceptions of crime and safety.
- *Round 4*: a 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).

The research surveys captured respondents from across the political spectrum, including Democrats, Independents, and Republicans, and across different regions and geographies.

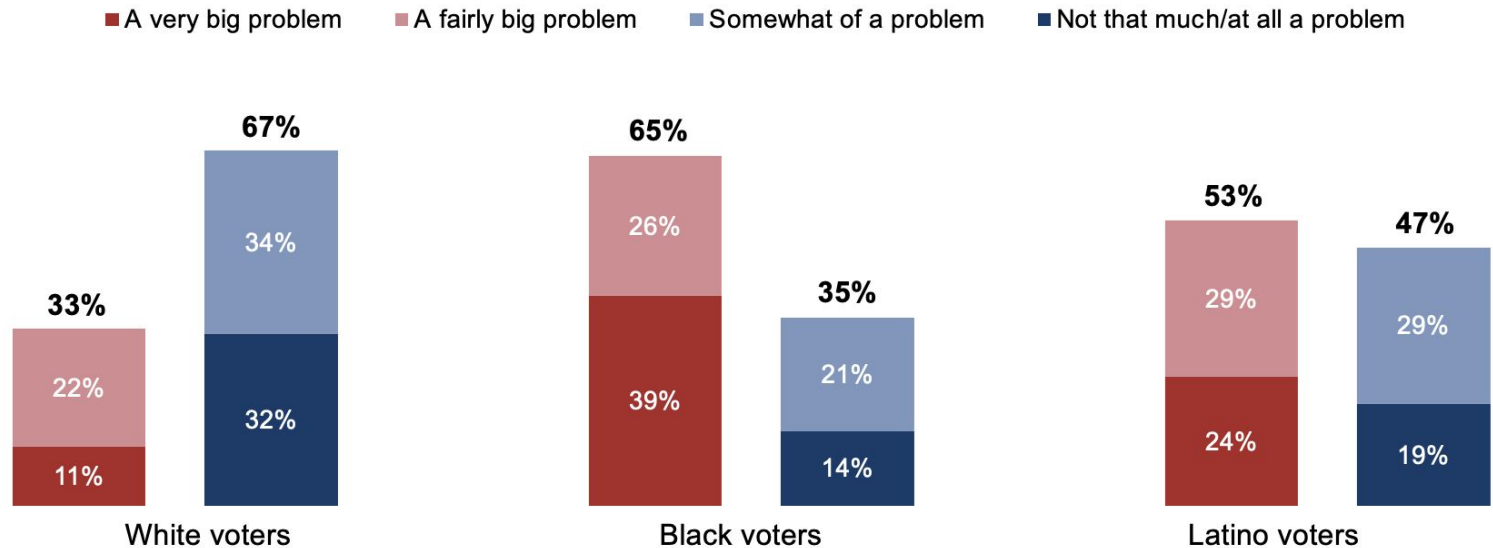
What are the most important lessons to keep in mind for a winning message on safety, accountability, and justice?

LESSON 1.

Acknowledge that crime is a top concern for many—especially in Black communities. However, concern does not equal support for more of the status quo.

We asked respondents how big of a problem is crime, not just in general but in their own community.

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



Among respondents most concerned about crime, they strongly favor a solutions approach over the status quo.

Which approach to public safety would you be more likely to support?

Tough on crime: Doing more to get tough on crime, like having stricter sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep potentially dangerous people in jail, and giving police more support and resources.

Crime 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 cracking down on illegal gun sales.

% More likely to support

| | Tough on crime % | Crime prevention % |
|---------------|------------------|--------------------|
| All Voters | 47 | 53 |
| White Voters | 51 | 49 |
| Black Voters | 36 | 64 |
| Latino Voters | 40 | 60 |
| Democrats | 24 | 76 |
| Independents | 48 | 52 |
| Republicans | 69 | 31 |
| Urban | 45 | 55 |
| Suburban | 46 | 54 |
| Rural | 52 | 48 |
| 18 to 34 | 34 | 66 |
| 35 to 49 | 43 | 57 |
| 50 to 64 | 53 | 47 |
| 65+ | 54 | 46 |

LESSON 2.

People understand that the causes of crime are systemic. They want less divisive rhetoric and more solutions to make communities safe.

In the first Remesh session, we tested three messages to address misinformation.

The most effective of these messages describes that homicides and gun violence went up throughout the U.S. By avoiding partisanship entirely, fewer participants fall back on political leanings on the issue. The statement also encourages many to theorize about the causes for increased violence.

BEST MESSAGE TESTED

This issue is more complex than some make it sound. Here are some facts about what research has shown.

Homicide rates and gun violence went up throughout the U.S. beginning in the summer of 2020 – not just in cities where the police scaled back traffic stops, but also in patches of rural America and other areas where police patrolling remained unchanged.

Inspired from Race Class Narrative work

Based on their responses to: **What would your “ideal community” have?**

Too negative, disempowering

No matter what we look like or what’s in our wallet, most of us want to live in safe communities that have economic opportunity, great schools, access to health care, good infrastructure, parks and activities, and a feeling of community.

But during elections, certain politicians will try to divide us on issues like crime and police ~~to try to get elected~~. They’ll point the finger at a few examples to distract people from the real problems and real solutions. They’ll try to scare us into voting for them and use one-liners about complex problems. Then they use the media to make it all worse.

We have the ability to solve tough problems. We’ve done it time and time again. We study the problem, we test out solutions, we keep at it, and we keep improving. Let’s demand real solutions from our leaders so we can make every community a safe, free, and just place to call home.

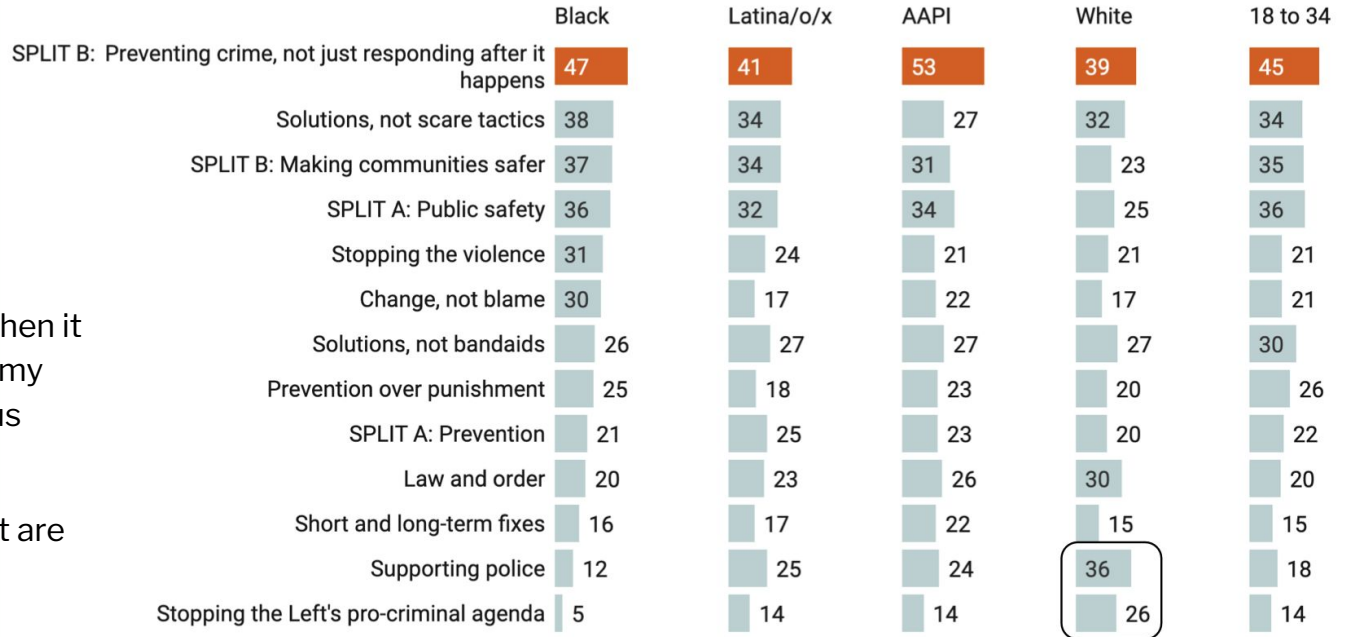


Makes me feel understood and optimistic

LESSON 3.

“Solutions, not scare tactics” and “preventing crime, not just reacting after,” are more effective brands than “law and order.”

When testing catch phrases, a “preventing crime” approach was the strongest performing message across all audiences.



Fill in the blank here. When it comes to crime, I want my elected officials to focus on...

Pick **three** of these that are closest to your views.

Use catch phrases about “solutions” and “preventing crime, not just reacting after” to reinforce everyone deserves to be safe.

92%

agree

62%

strongly

Everyone deserves to be safe. We need to focus on **preventing crime in the first place**, not just reacting to it after it happens.

LESSON 4.

Own the issue of safety and begin with a strong, affirmative vision of what safe communities look like. Don't let the opposition define your vision for you.

Begin with a positive vision for safety and engage in an honest conversation about what makes communities safe.

74%

agree

43%

strongly

The safest places in America don't have more police, more jails, more prisons, and harsher sentences. They have access to jobs and economic prosperity. They have good schools. There's housing and healthcare. There's good infrastructure. There's trust between the community and the police. There's hope for the future.

LESSON 5.

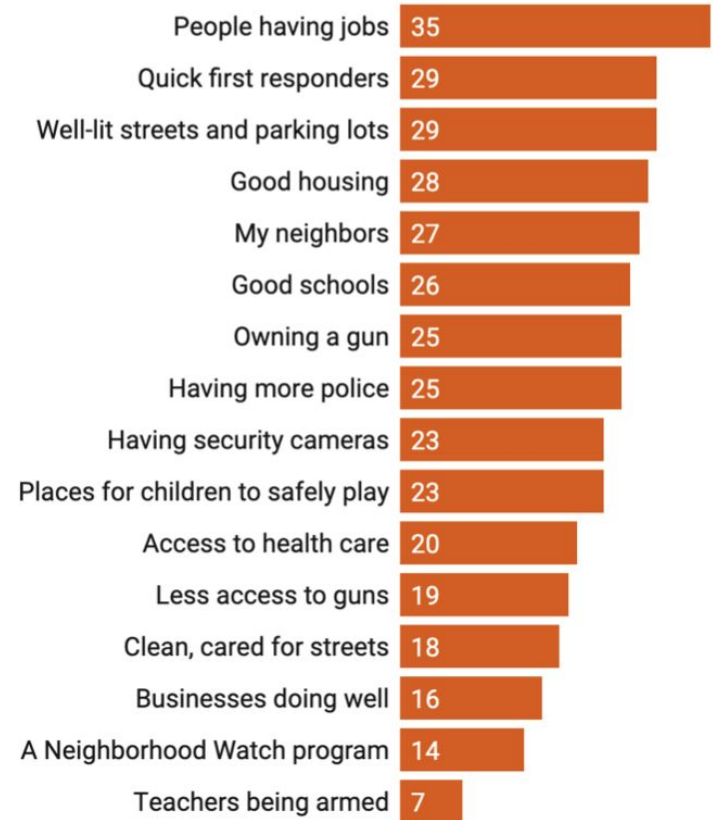
People favor investments to make communities safer over more of the status quo. That holds up across different regions of the country.

Respondents identify a range of factors that contribute to stability and neighborhood safety.

Think about being safe in your own neighborhood and community.

What factors make you feel safe?

Choose the top 3 or 4 for you.



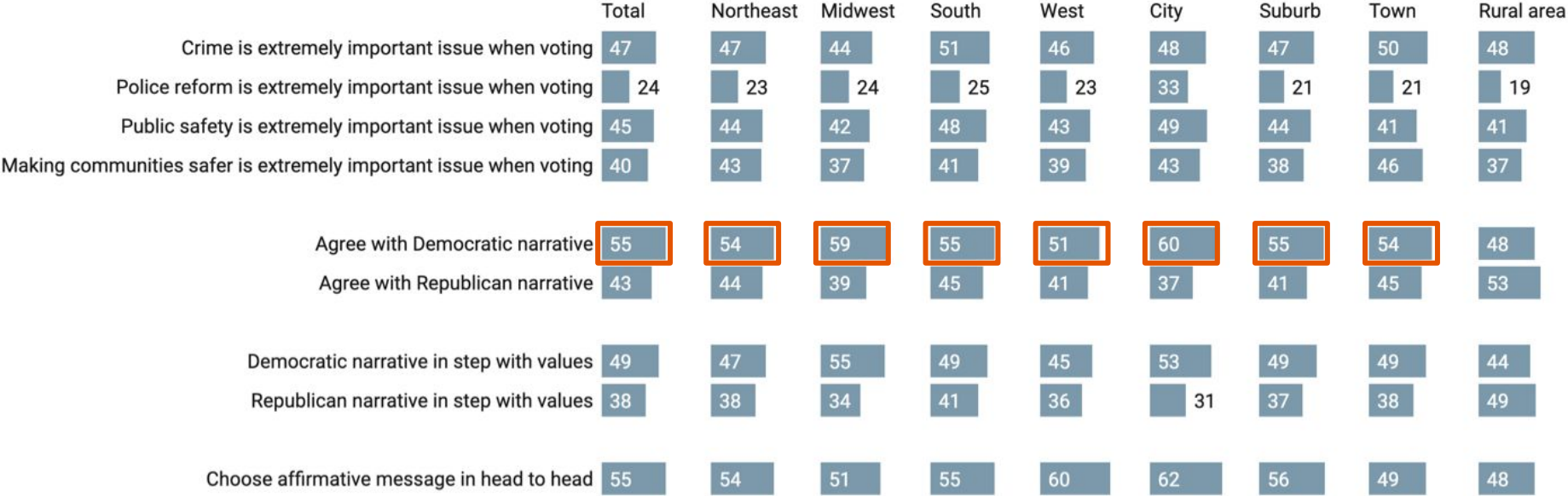
Respondents rank the following solutions to crime and safety as more effective than “tough on crime” measures.

MOST LIKELY TO BE SEEN AS EFFECTIVE:

- Working across party lines toward a common goal of safe communities (63% say would help “a lot” to improve safety)
- 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%)

For comparison: 38% say that having harsher sentences and things like mandatory minimums to keep people in prison would help a lot. Fewer than half (43%) says putting 100,000 more police on the ground would help a lot to improve safety.

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



LESSON 6.

Many view the police favorably *and* they also want policing reform and accountability.

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



LESSON 7.

A “defund” attack can be countered by calling it out for what it is—a scare tactic—and instead offering solutions.

In head-to-head message testing, a solutions-oriented response strongly outperformed a “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%

LESSON 8.

Accountability matters when people break the law, but it also matters for leaders to deliver on their promises of a safer and more just legal system.

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.

LESSON 9.

Solutions about preventing crime and not just reacting after outperform every other message—even a “tough on crime” one.

“A safe walk home at night. A subway ride free of fear. A safer New York for every child. That’s what Kathy Hochul is working for as governor, and she passed a comprehensive crime plan to make it happen...”



Head-to-head, a preventive solutions message outperforms the scare tactics *and* the “tough on crime” response.

% Agree with more

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43

57

+15 pts

Too many in my party thought it was okay not to talk about the growing violent crime problem in our community. They focused only on defunding the police. From day one, we needed to rush in more police. Get criminals into jail. There are less than 5 members in the U.S. House who are for defunding the police. They are extreme and aren't listening to the voters. But, the rest of us are. Our plan will add 100,000 more police on the ground. *Base n = 710*

44

56

+11 pts

LESSON 10.

There is a three-part messaging frame that works to win the narrative on safety, accountability, and justice.

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 about solutions, not scare tactics, to make communities safe.

2. **The villain is the status quo.**

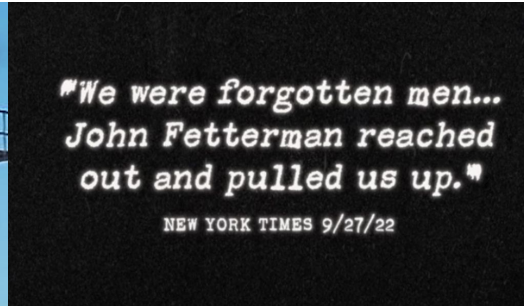
Across the political spectrum, people do not believe the current approach to crime and safety is working. If it were, we would be the safest country in the world.

3. **Pivot to solutions.**

The public strongly supports more investment in community-based solutions for safety and many policy proposals for justice reform. Highlight these changes as part of a comprehensive approach to crime-fighting and making communities safe.

**How do we know this
message works?**

Republicans spent over \$10 million on ads depicting Fetterman as a far-left softy—but his record suggests otherwise.



POLITICS LAW ENFORCEMENT PENNSYLVANIA MICHIGAN

John Fetterman Enlists Local Sheriff For TV Ad Rebutting Soft-On-Crime Charge

"John Fetterman has the courage to do what's right," the suburban Philadelphia sheriff says of the Democrat. "Dr. Oz doesn't know a thing about crime."

By Daniel Marans



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

- 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.

The New York Times

Chicago Mayor's Race Could Be a Blueprint for Democratic Messaging on Crime

Brandon Johnson, a progressive Democrat, prevailed over his more moderate challenger after holding the position that officials must take a fundamentally different approach to public safety.

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