

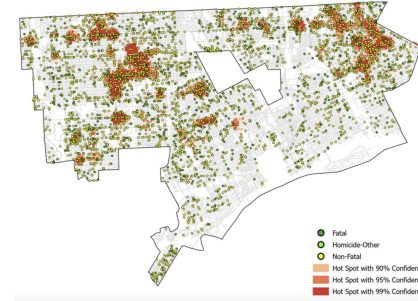
WINNING THE NARRATIVE ON SAFETY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND JUSTICE IN MICHIGAN:

Lessons and takeaways from polling,
public opinion research and recent elections

March 2024

Vera ACTION

MICHIGAN IS IN A GOOD PLACE WHEN IT COMES TO SAFETY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND JUSTICE



Michigan Enacts Landmark Jail Reforms

Historic legislation aims to reduce incarcerated populations, improve public safety

ISSUE BRIEF | September 23, 2021 | Read time: 14 min



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6 Community Partners selected for neighborhood Community Violence Initiative contracts

JUN 14 2023 MAYOR'S OFFICE

Guest Commentary

Opinion | Criminal justice reform is the right thing to do, for all of Michigan

March 15, 2018 [Doug DeVos](#) [Guest Commentary](#)

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DETROIT

Detroit records fewest homicides since 1966, but 'we've got a lot of work to do'



[Andrea May Sahouri](#)
Detroit Free Press

Published 6:40 p.m. ET Jan. 3, 2024 | Updated 6:14 a.m. ET Jan. 4, 2024



Detroit recorded 252 homicides in 2023 — it's the city's fewest since 1966, when there were 232 homicides in Detroit, the city announced Wednesday in a two-hour news conference with numerous federal, state, and city law enforcement agencies and community leaders.

That homicide total is an 18% drop from last year, when the city recorded 309 homicides. That's 57 fewer Detroiters killed, Detroit Police Chief James White and Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan emphasized Wednesday.

"These are bodies. These are people. These are lives. This is trauma that didn't happen," White said.

"But we're certainly not patting ourselves on the back — I think we all agree that it is entirely too violent in our communities ... we've got a lot of work to do. This is not a victory celebration. This is really doubling down on the work."

BUT FEARS ABOUT CRIME—AND ITS POTENTIAL IMPACT ON ELECTIONS—ARE STILL VERY REAL

AG Nessel Issues Statement Following Spike in Hate Crimes

October 30, 2023

LANSING – Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel issued the statement following a reported increase in hate crimes by both the [Anti-Defamation League](#) and the [Council on American-Islamic Relations](#).

“As Attorney General, I created a dedicated unit to investigate and prosecute bias-motivated crimes. My Hate Crimes and Domestic Terrorism Unit works with federal, state and local law enforcement partners to ensure crimes of this nature are thoroughly investigated and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. No one should fear for their safety because of who they are, where they worship --- or any other unique attribute that contributes to the diversity of our state.

“I encourage any member of the public and other law enforcement agencies to contact the Hate Crimes Unit if they have knowledge of, or are a victim of, a crime motivated by hate.”

Rep. Harris blasts latest effort to let dangerous criminals out of prison early

RELEASE | May 23, 2023 Contact: [Mike Harris](#)

Harris advocates for victims against ‘prison-break policies’

State Rep. Mike Harris criticized legislation to reduce prison sentences for dangerous criminals.

The House Criminal Justice Committee on Tuesday considered House Bills 4450-4453, which would create a system of “productivity credits” to allow criminals out of prison before their minimum sentences are concluded, while also shortening their maximum prison sentences. Harris, a retired law enforcement officer who serves on the panel, noted that even violent or dangerous offenders guilty of attempted murder, arson, domestic violence, or fentanyl distribution could have their sentences reduced.

**THE BIG TAKEAWAY FROM
MICHIGAN'S RESEARCH:**

**To protect momentum for justice reform
and counter tough-on-crime backsliding,
Michiganders need to hear that their
elected leaders are 'serious about safety.'**

'SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY' RESONATES WITH MICHIGANDERS—EVEN SURPRISING VOTER BLOCS

When asked who they would be most likely to vote for, Michiganders favored candidates who own a 'serious about safety' message over a 'tough-on-crime' one. In this head-to-head split test, the 'serious' message outperformed a 'tough' one for all voters—especially Independent, young, and working class voters.

	OVERALL	IND	YOUNG	WHITE MEN	BLUE COLLAR
GOP ATTACK	48	53	43	62	48
DEM "ALSO TOUGH"	47	39	52	33	45



	OVERALL	IND	YOUNG	WHITE MEN	BLUE COLLAR
GOP ATTACK	45	40	37	55	41
DEM "SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY"	50	50	59	39	54



WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

While ‘tough-on-crime’ attacks have not dominated recent Michigan races, a look at elections in other parts of the country are a signal for what might be coming in Michigan’s 2024 election cycle.

'TOUGH ON CRIME' CAN BE A POTENT ATTACK, BUT NOT IF COUNTERED BY 'SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY'

The New York Times

Intelligencer

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.

EARLY AND OFTEN | DEC. 18, 2022

The Data That Shows Progressives Can Win on Crime Prevention beats getting tough.

By Ross Barkan, a frequent contributor to New York

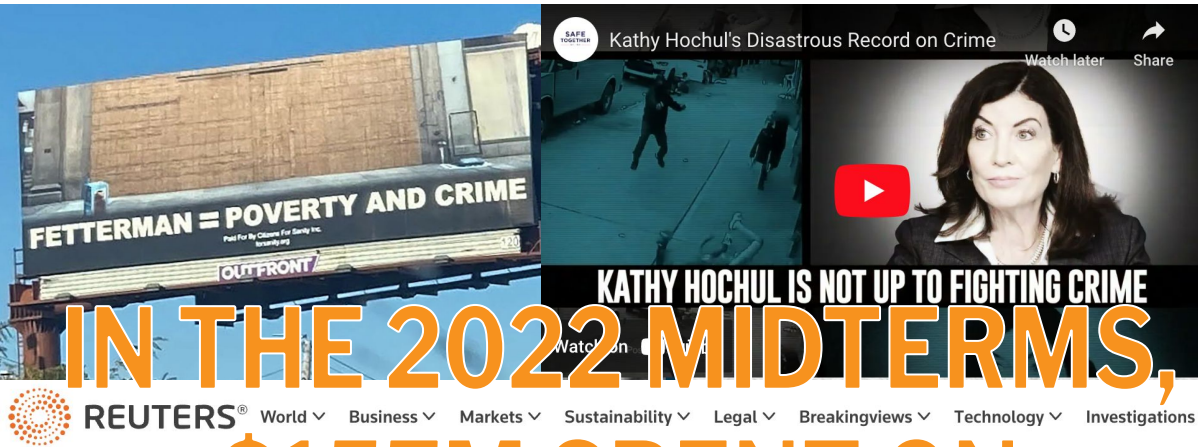
YET RECENT WINS SHOW TOUGH ON CRIME DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK

Democrat upsets DeSantis-backed Republican mayoral candidate in Jacksonville

MAY 18, 2023 · 7:19 AM ET

FROM WJCT News

Deegan faced significant challenges during her campaign, with her participation in Black Lives Matter protests being targeted by her opponent and his allies. Local law enforcement warned of potential "radical policies" under Deegan's leadership.



IN THE 2022 MIDTERMS,

\$157M SPENT ON CRIME ATTACK ADS

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.

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

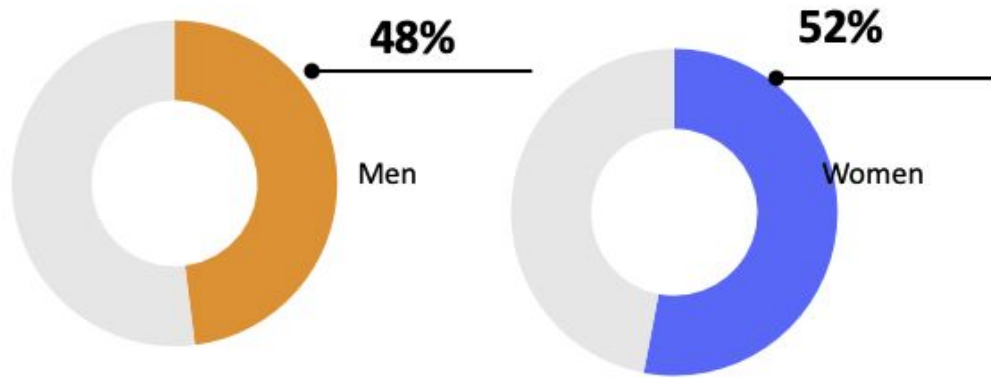
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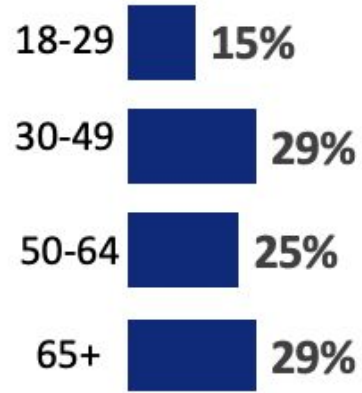
FALL 2023 POLLING WITH GQR:
**20-minute statewide poll of ~800 Michigan
likely voters to understand their views on
crime and how this issue impacts their vote.**
(+/- 3.5% margin of error at 95% confidence interval)

Demographic Information

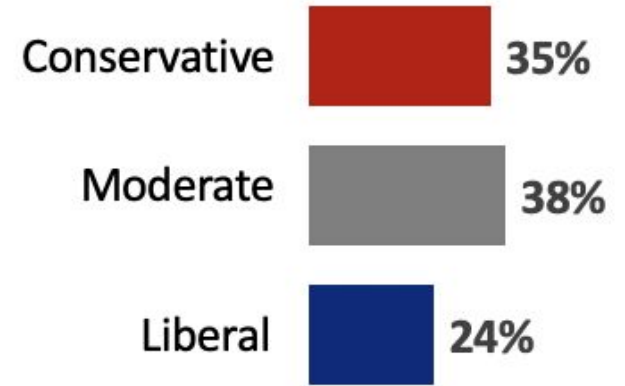
Gender



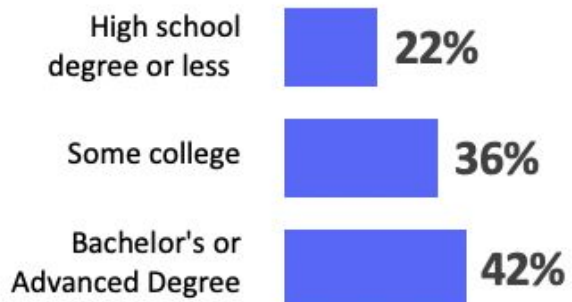
Age



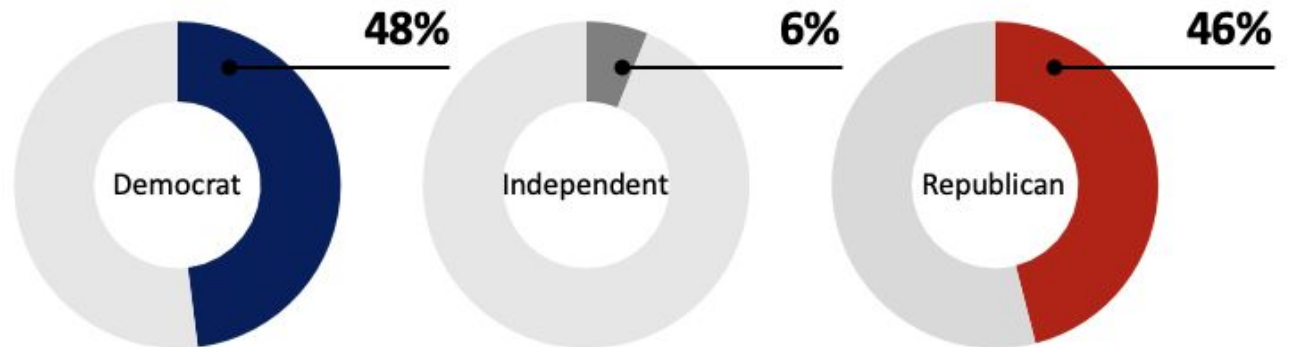
Ideology



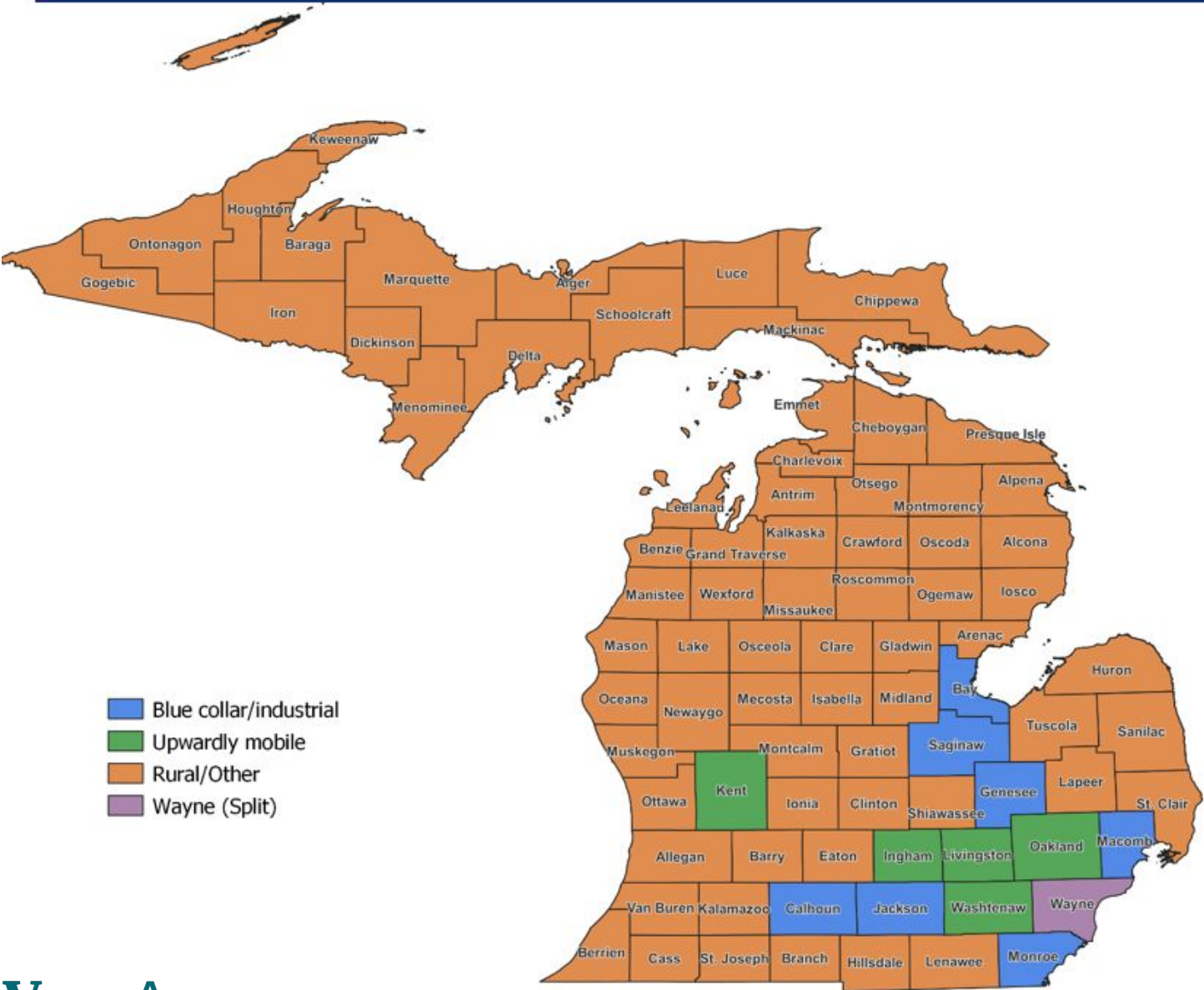
Education



Partisanship



Statewide class regions



BLUE: Blue collar/industrial

- Bay, Saginaw, Genesee, Macomb, Monroe, Jackson, Calhoun, parts of Wayne (downriver, western and southern portions)

GREEN: Upwardly mobile

- Kent, Ingham, Livingston, Oakland, Washtenaw, parts of Wayne (Grosse Pointes, Livonia, Canton, Plymouth, Northville)

ORANGE: Rural/rest of state

PURPLE: Wayne County

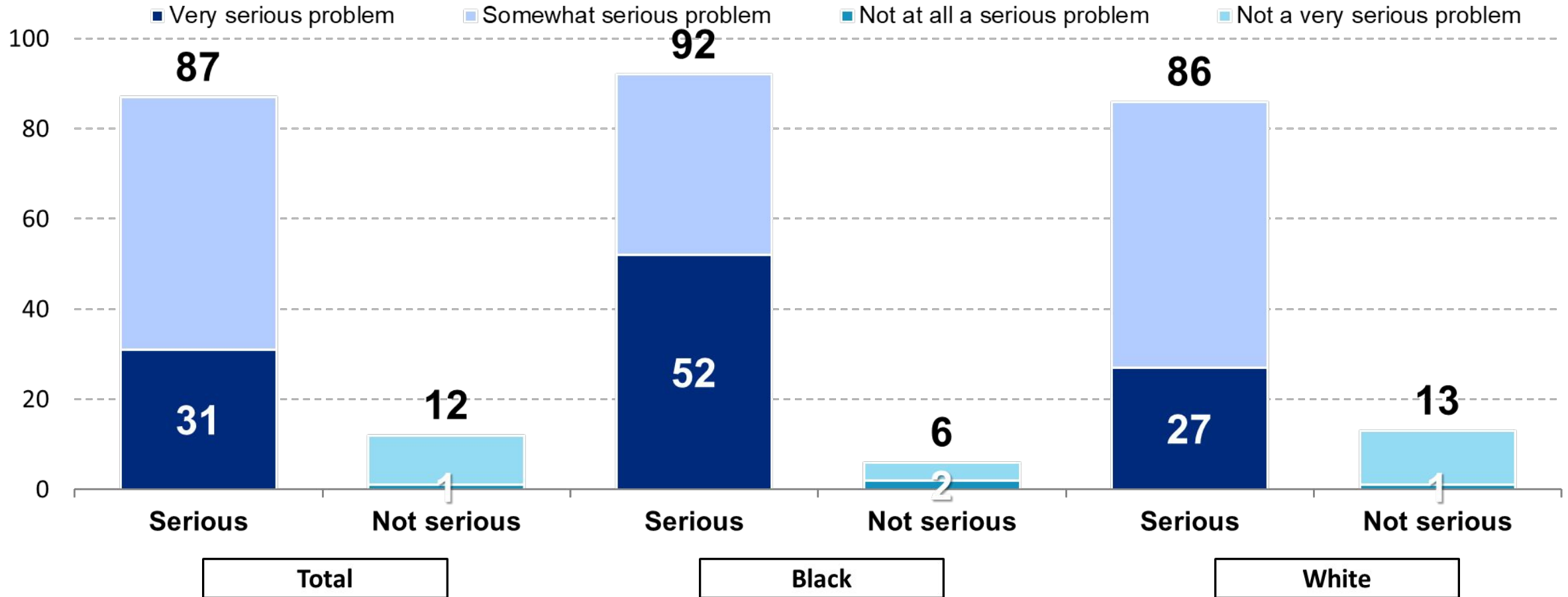
- See next slide for Wayne County breakdown

LESSON # 1.

Concerns about crime do NOT equal support for more 'tough-on-crime' policies.

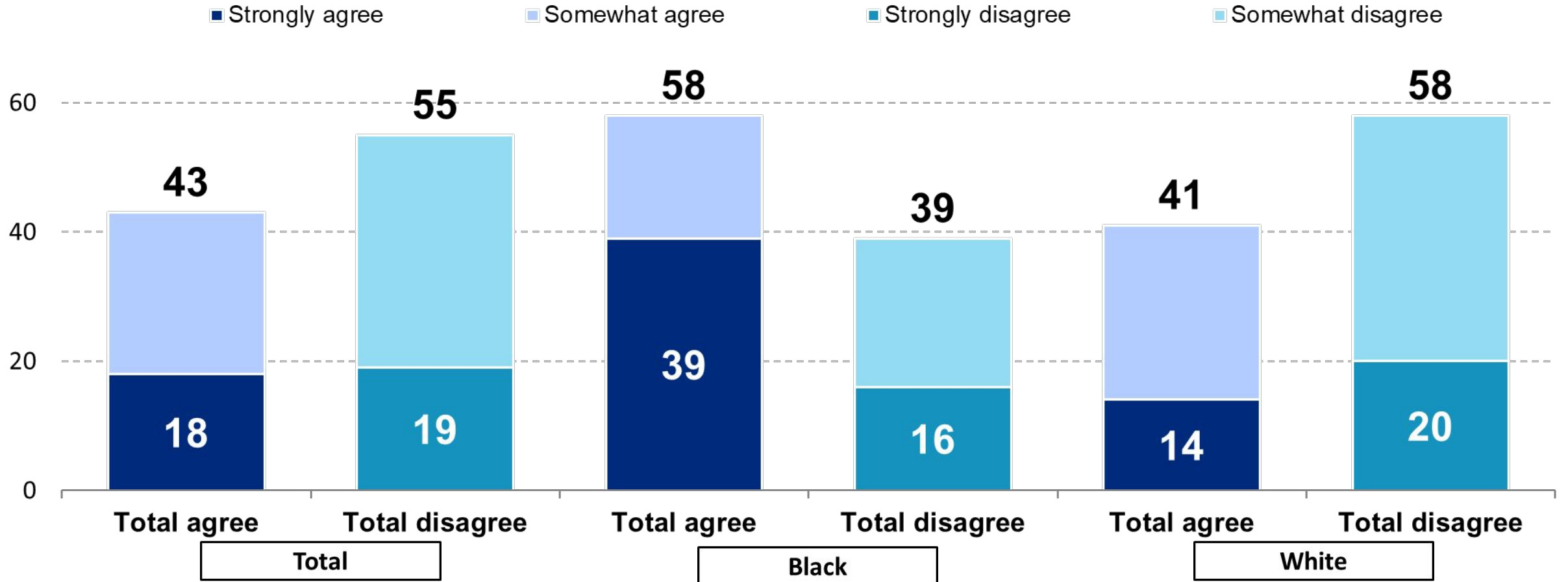
CRIME IS A PERENNIAL CONCERN FOR MICHIGANDERS

How serious of a problem is crime in Michigan?



BLACK MICHIGANDERS IN PARTICULAR ARE WORRIED ABOUT CRIME IN THEIR OWN NEIGHBORHOODS

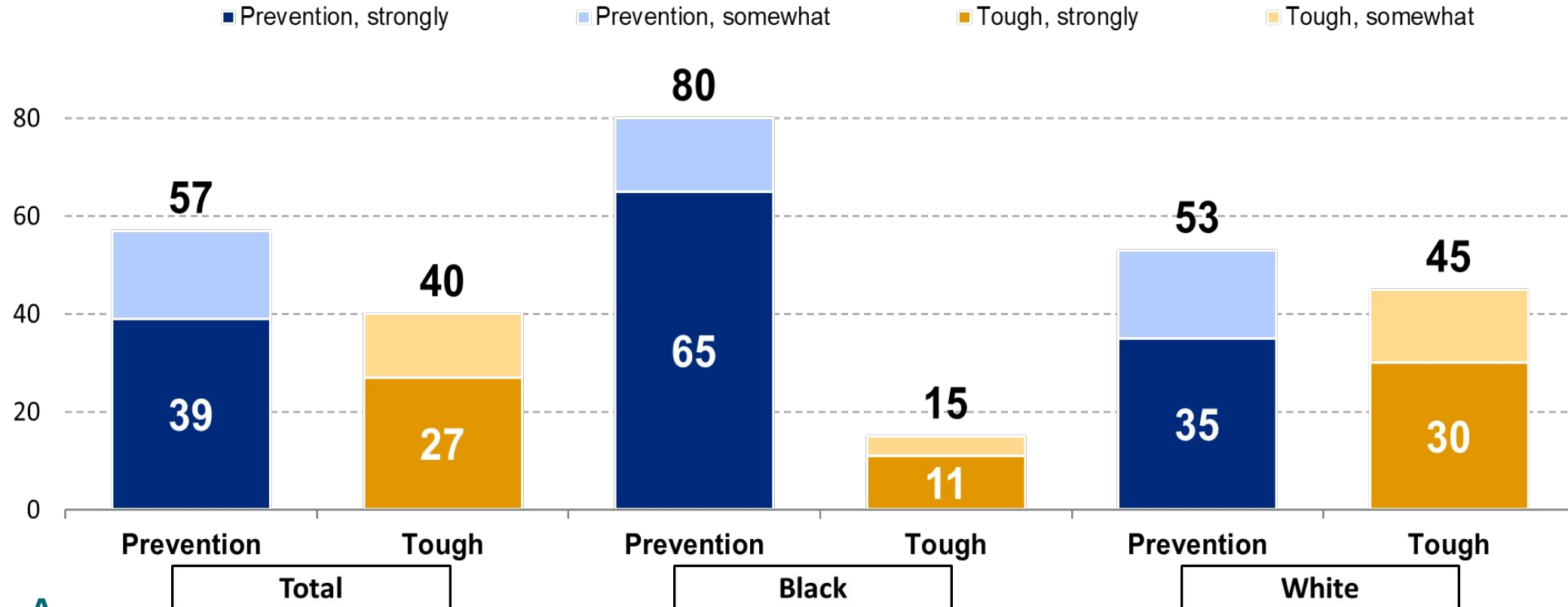
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: *I think crime is a serious problem in my community.*



YET CONCERNS ABOUT CRIME DO NOT TRANSLATE TO SUPPORT FOR 'TOUGH-ON-CRIME' POLICIES

SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY: Fully fund things to create safe communities and improve people's quality of life, like good schools, a living wage, affordable housing, and do more to prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and getting illegal guns off the street.

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.



THAT REMAINS TRUE EVEN AMONG INDEPENDENT, WORKING CLASS, AND RURAL MICHIGANDERS

SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY

TOUGH ON CRIME

	SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY	TOUGH ON CRIME
Total	57	40
Democrat	79	19
Independent	59	37
Republican	30	68
Blue Collar/Industrial	58	40
Upwardly Mobile	60	36
Detroit/Dearborn	75	22
Rural/Rest of state	50	47
Younger people	66	31
Older people	49	48
White men	45	52
White women	60	38
Black men	89	4
Black women	72	25

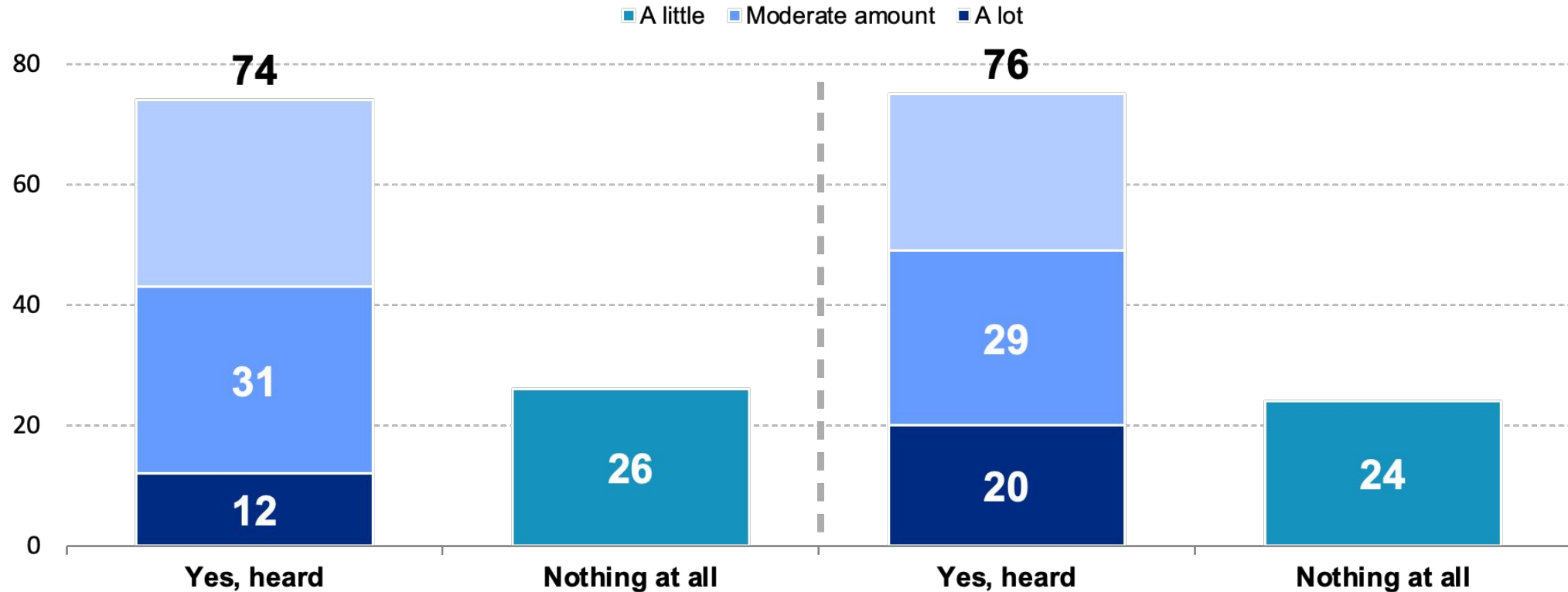
LESSON # 2.

Leaning into safety early and often builds upon existing advantages that both parties have with Michigan voters.

UNLIKE VOTERS IN OTHER STATES, MICHIGANDERS SAY THEY HEAR FROM BOTH PARTIES EQUALLY ON CRIME

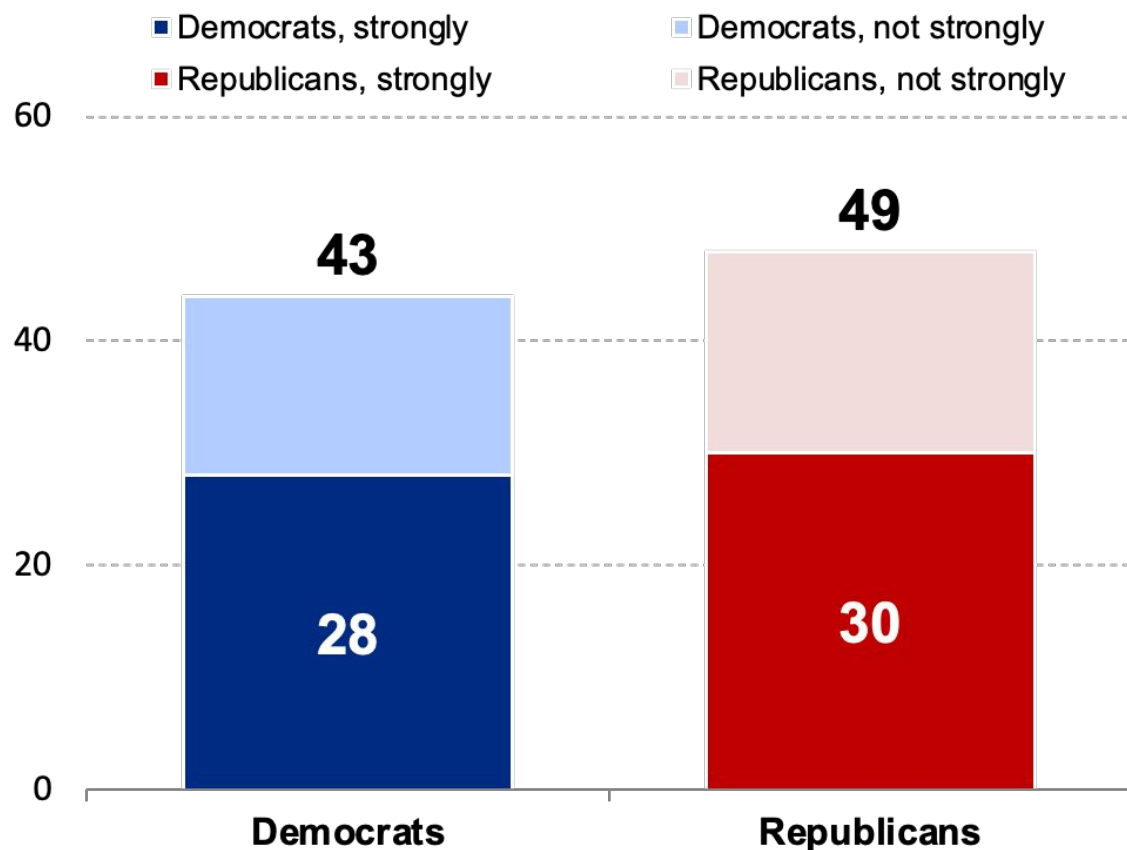
How much do you hear from **Democrats** on crime and making communities safer? Would you say you've heard a lot, a moderate amount, just a little, or nothing at all?

How much do you hear from **Republicans** on crime and making communities safer? Would you say you've heard a lot, a moderate amount, just a little, or nothing at all?



THE GOP HAS A SLIGHT ADVANTAGE ON TRUST, LARGELY DRIVEN BY WHITE AND RURAL VOTERS

Please tell me if you trust Democrats in Michigan or Republicans in Michigan more on reducing crime and making communities safer?



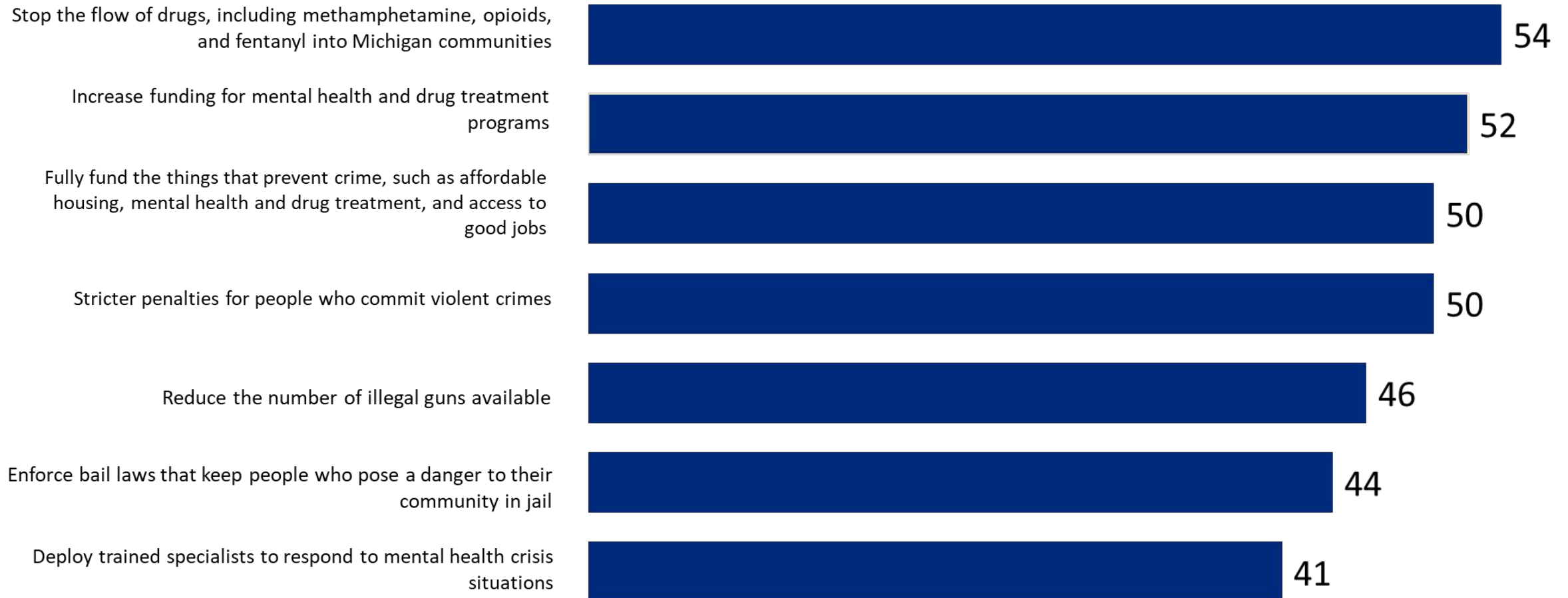
	<i>Total Dem – Total Rep</i>
White	40 – 55
Black	70 – 13
White men	31 – 62
White women	48 – 48
Black men	70 – 12
Black women	70 – 14
Blue Collar/Industrial	44 – 47
Upwardly Mobile	50 – 44
Detroit/Dearborn	67 – 19
Rural/Rest of state	33 – 60

LESSON # 3.

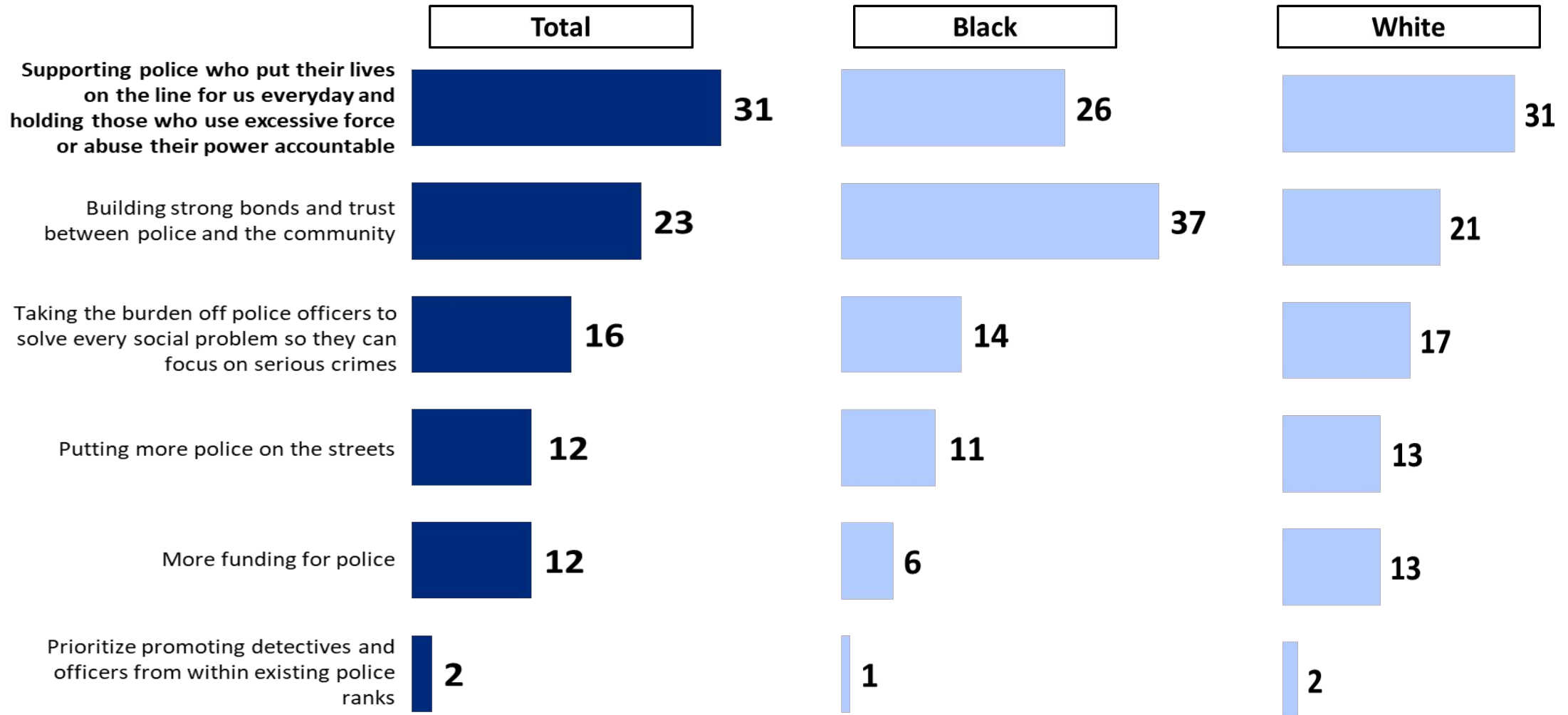
Michiganders want prevention and treatment solutions over more ‘tough on crime.’

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION TOPS THE LIST OF FAVORED POLICY SOLUTIONS TO DECREASE CRIME

What extent, if it all, do you believe the following proposals will decrease crime in Michigan?



EVEN ON THORNY TOPICS LIKE POLICING, A MESSAGE OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY WINS



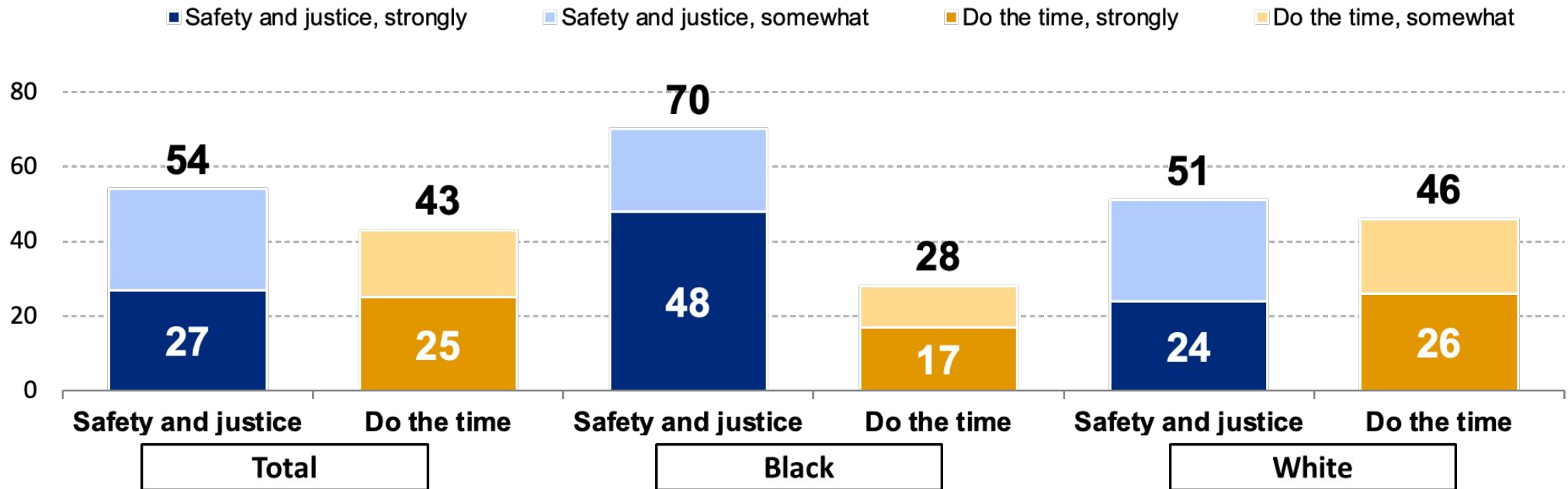
LESSON # 4.

**Accountability matters, but Michiganders
want more than a punishment-only approach.**

WHEN ASKED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN A SAFETY VERSUS TOUGH APPROACH ON ACCOUNTABILITY, SAFETY WINS

SAFETY & JUSTICE: Some say crime is out of control and, to make communities safe, people who break the law must be held accountable. This means seeing the harm they've done, accepting the consequences, learning from mistakes, and changing their behavior. Harsh punishment and long sentences alone lead to more violence. We need to provide people with programs that work to turn their lives around and prevent future crime.

DO THE CRIME, DO THE TIME: Others say crime is out of control, and we need to make sure that people who break the law are held accountable by enforcing strict punishments. If you do the crime, you should do the time, and that means serving the full sentence. Offenders shouldn't be able to get out of jail or prison early simply because they complete programs or have a good track record behind bars.



LESSON # 5.

Even when facing attacks, leaning in with a 'serious about safety' message beats 'I too am tough on crime.'

ONE GOP ATTACK, TWO DIFFERENT DEM RESPONSES

GOP SOFT-ON-CRIME ATTACK:

Republicans are tackling crime and protecting law-abiding Michiganders. They will stop the revolving door for criminals, make sure criminals serve their full sentence and force prosecutors to prosecute all cases, big and small. Republicans will "back the Blue" by increasing police funding and putting more officers on the streets. Unlike Democrats, who support "soft on crime" policies like eliminating cash bail and releasing violent criminals from prison early, Republicans will restore law and order to stop crime.

DEMOCRAT "I TOO AM TOUGH ON CRIME" RESPONSE:

Democrats will restore law and order to Michigan's communities. Addressing crime means getting illegal guns off the street, improving police response times and solving serious crime. Democrats will add more funding for police, crack down on violent criminals, and go after the worst offenders by imposing stricter sentences. Unlike Republicans, who talk a big game but oppose common-sense gun safety laws, Democrats know what works to be both tough and smart on crime.

DEMOCRAT "I AM SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY" RESPONSE:

Democrats will make Michigan's communities safer, preventing crime before it happens by investing in schools, housing, and mental health and addiction programs. Addressing violent crime means getting illegal guns off the street, improving police response times and solving serious crime. Democrats support police who put their lives on the line but also hold them accountable for abuse. Unlike Republicans, who oppose programs that prevent crime and common-sense gun laws, Democrats have solutions that work to make every neighborhood safe.

EVEN IN RESPONSE TO A ‘SOFT-ON-CRIME’ ATTACK, MICHIGANDERS FAVOR ‘SERIOUS’ OVER ‘TOUGH’

Now, I am going to read you statements that Democrats and Republicans are making about addressing crime and public safety in Michigan. Which of the following statements do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?

	OVERALL	IND	YOUNG	WHITE MEN	BLUE COLLAR
GOP ATTACK	48	51	43	63	45
DEM “ALSO TOUGH”	47	42	53	33	49



	OVERALL	IND	YOUNG	WHITE MEN	BLUE COLLAR
GOP ATTACK	47	46	40	57	46
DEM “SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY”	48	47	58	39	50



A LESSON FROM VIRGINIA:

A bellwether for the 2024 battlegrounds, crime dominated VA's 2023 state-level races with \$25 million spent in the state during the election cycle. Despite hearing virtually nonstop 'tough-on-crime' rhetoric, VA voters still favor a 'serious about safety' approach.

VIRGINIA 2023 AND CLOSE TO \$25M ON CRIME ADS: TESTING TWO 'TOUGH' ADS, ONE 'SAFETY' AD

#1

GOP candidate touting more funding for police and 'tough on crime' approach



**Republican Candidate
Juan Pablo Segura**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VN6zlrXQszE>

#2

Dem candidate touting support for police, police endorsements, and gun control measures



**Democratic Candidate
Nadarius Clark**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqDu65zyvT0>

#3

Dem candidate touting comprehensive approach and being 'serious about safety'



**Mock ad for a Democratic
candidate**

<https://vimeo.com/912348236/4be896715d?share=copy>

A woman with curly hair, wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt, is lifting a young girl with curly hair and a red headband. The girl is wearing a blue and white checkered shirt and dark pants. They are in a bedroom with a white crib and a window in the background. The woman is smiling and looking up at the girl.

SAFETY
ACCOUNTABILITY
JUSTICE

WHAT DEMOCRATS
STAND FOR

<https://vimeo.com/912348236/4be896715d?share=copy>

'SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY' BEATS 'TOUGH ON CRIME' – AND WINS BLACK VOTERS, HOLDS INDEPENDENTS

Which ad is most aligned with your views?

AD # 1:
GOP
TOUGH



AD # 2:
DEM
TOUGH



AD # 3:
DEM
SAFETY



	AD # 1	AD # 2	AD # 3
OVERALL	23%	26%	34%
BLACK VOTERS	6%	36%	47%
LATINO VOTERS	17%	37%	37%
WHITE VOTERS	27%	23%	31%
GEN Z VOTERS	13%	34%	37%
BOOMERS	25%	23%	27%
DEMOCRATIC VOTERS	7%	33%	54%
REPUBLICAN VOTERS	40%	18%	15%
INDEPENDENT VOTERS	21%	28%	29%

LESSONS FROM THE RESEARCH-OWNING SAFETY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND JUSTICE

1. SAFETY

Real solutions that work to prevent crime, respond to crisis, and stop violence.

2. ACCOUNTABILITY

Personal responsibility is about repair and changing behavior, not just punishment.

3. JUSTICE

A system that works for all by relying less on incarceration and more on the things proven to help communities thrive.

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