WINNING THE NARRATIVE ON SAFETY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND JUSTICE IN PENNSYLVANIA:
Lessons and takeaways from polling, public opinion research and recent elections

March 2024
CRIME ATTACKS DOMINATED PENNSYLVANIA RACES IN 2022—WITH $10M+ SPENT ON ADS

THE HILL

The Memo: Republicans find traction with ‘soft-on-crime’ attacks on Democrats

Niall Stanage
October 7, 2022 · 5 min read

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.

AIPAC Echoes Republicans’ Crime Messaging in Pennsylvania

After failing to stop Democrat Summer Lee’s primary bid, the pro-Israel group is now helping Republicans put the seat into play.

BY AUSTIN AHLMAN NOVEMBER 1, 2022
First TV ad in PA-12 brings familiar attacks against U.S. Rep. Summer Lee

In the 30-second spot, candidate Laurie MacDonald, president and CEO of the Pittsburgh-based nonprofit Center for Victims, calls herself a “law and order Democrat.”

MacDonald told the Capital-Star in an email that her experience at the Center for Victims gave her insight into “trauma and tragedy that soft on crime policies bring to communities,” adding that she would “prioritize victims and survivors over criminals with every policy and every vote.”

“If you’re sick and tired of all the divisive rhetoric and the us versus them mentality, I’m with you,” MacDonald says in the ad.

When asked what “us versus them” referred to, MacDonald’s campaign said that Lee has aligned herself “with the most radical wing of the Democrat party” claiming “that’s not where most voters in our community stand.”
THE BIG TAKEAWAY FROM PENNSYLVANIA’S RESEARCH:
To protect momentum for justice reform and counter tough-on-crime backsliding, Pennsylvanians are looking for leaders who are ‘serious about safety.’
‘TOUGH ON CRIME’ CAN BE A POTENT ATTACK, BUT NOT IF COUNTERED BY ‘SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY’

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.

YEY RECENT WINS SHOW TOUGH ON CRIME DOESN’T ALWAYS WORK

The Data That Shows Progressives Can Win on Crime

Prevention beats getting tough.

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.
MARCH 2024 POLLING WITH GQR:
20-minute statewide poll of 700 PA Registered Voters (600 weighted)
123 12th CD Voters (19 weighted)
+/- 3.7% margin of error at 95% confidence interval;
+/-9.8% margin of error for CD-12 respondents
Demographic Information

Gender

- Men: 48%
- Women: 52%

Age

- 18-29: 16%
- 30-49: 30%
- 50-64: 25%
- 65+: 28%

Ideology

- Liberal: 30%
- Moderate: 32%
- Conservative: 36%

Education

- High school degree or less: 29%
- Some college: 30%
- Bachelor’s or Advanced Degree: 40%

Party Registration

- Democrat: 43%
- Other: 16%
- Republican: 41%

Vera ACTION
### Demographic Information Continued

#### Race
- White: 83
- POC: 17

#### Region
- Philadelphia County: 12
- Allegheny County: 11
- Inner Phila Suburbs: 21
- Outer Phila Market: 8
- Outer Pittsburgh Market: 11
- Scranton/Wilkes-Barre: 11
- North/Central: 10
- Harrisburg Reg/DC Market: 16

#### Media Markets
- Philadelphia: 41
- Pittsburgh: 22
- Other Markets: 37
LESSON # 1.

Concerns about crime do NOT equal support for more ‘tough-on-crime’ policies.
How serious of a problem is crime in Pennsylvania? Is it a very serious problem, somewhat serious problem, not very serious problem, or not at all a serious problem?

CRIME IS A PERENNIAL CONCERN FOR PENNSYLVANIANS

Source: GQR March 2024 Pennsylvania survey commissioned by Vera Action
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.

Source: GQR March 2024 Pennsylvania survey commissioned by Vera Action
**INDEPENDENTS, WOMEN, AND VOTERS UNDER 50 STATEWIDE PREFER ‘SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY</th>
<th>TOUGH ON CRIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent men</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent women</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 50</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College men</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non college men</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College women</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non college women</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GQR March 2024 Pennsylvania survey commissioned by Vera Action
LESSON # 2.
Leaning into safety early and often builds upon existing advantages that both parties have with Pennsylvania voters. Silence is deadly.
DISTINCT FROM STATEWIDE TRENDS, VOTERS IN CD-12 TRUST DEMOCRATS MORE ON CRIME AND SAFETY

Do you trust Democrats or Republicans more on reducing crime and making communities safer?

- Total Democrats: Democrats strongly (28), Democrats not strongly (34), Total (62)
- Total Republicans: Republicans strongly (40), Republicans not strongly (26), Total (66)
- Total (CD-12): Democrats strongly (48), Republicans strongly (35), Total (83)

Source: GQR March 2024 Pennsylvania survey commissioned by Vera Action
STATEWIDE, DEMOCRATS HAVE THE ADVANTAGE ON GUNS BUT NEED TO CLOSE THE GAP ON SAFETY

For each of the job aspects I read, please tell me if you believe Democrats do a better job or if you believe Republicans do a better job?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Aspect</th>
<th>Total Democrats</th>
<th>Total Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reducing crime</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public safety</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community safety</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun violence</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GQR March 2024 Pennsylvania survey commissioned by Vera Action
DISTINCT FROM STATEWIDE, IN CD-12 ACROSS THE BOARD DEMOCRATS ARE AHEAD ON CRIME/SAFETY

For each of the job aspects I read, please tell me if you believe Democrats do a better job or if you believe Republicans do a better job.

- Reducing crime
  - Democrats strongly: 54
  - Democrats not strongly: 35
  - Republicans strongly: 35
  - Republicans not strongly: 23

- Public safety
  - Democrats strongly: 53
  - Democrats not strongly: 38
  - Republicans strongly: 36
  - Republicans not strongly: 25

- Community safety
  - Democrats strongly: 57
  - Democrats not strongly: 38
  - Republicans strongly: 30
  - Republicans not strongly: 24

- Gun violence
  - Democrats strongly: 59
  - Democrats not strongly: 46
  - Republicans strongly: 29
  - Republicans not strongly: 21

Source: GQR March 2024 Pennsylvania survey commissioned by Vera Action
LESSON #3.
Pennsylvanians prefer prevention and treatment solutions over more ‘tough on crime.’
**PREVENTION AND TREATMENT TOPS THE LIST OF FAVORED POLICY SOLUTIONS TO DECREASE CRIME**

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

Percent say “help a lot”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting illegal guns off the streets.</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SPLIT) Increasing access to mental health care.</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SPLIT) Building trust between the police and the community.</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure public safety, not wealth, determines who stays in jail while awaiting trial.</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GQR March 2024 Pennsylvania survey commissioned by Vera Action
FUNDING SERVICES RANKS HIGHER THAN POLICE OR LONGER SENTENCES TO DECREASE CRIME

What extent, if it all, do you believe the following proposals will decrease crime in Pennsylvania? Percent say “help a lot”

- (SPLIT) Increasing funding for affordable housing, good schools, and living wages. 49%
- Fully funding programs and services that break the cycle of crime. 48%
- (SPLIT) Addressing poverty, economic despair, and lack of opportunities. 47%
- (SPLIT) Having alternatives to 911 and police for people going through mental health crises. 45%
- (SPLIT) Putting 100,000 more police on the streets. 37%
- Having longer prison sentences for people who commit crimes. 34%

Source: GQR March 2024 Pennsylvania survey commissioned by Vera Action
**EVEN ON THORNY TOPICS LIKE POLICING, A MESSAGE OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY WINS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>CD - 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporting police who put their lives on the line for us everyday and holding those who use excessive force or abuse their power accountable</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building strong bonds and trust between police and the community</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking the burden off police officers to solve every social problem so they can focus on serious crimes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting more police on the streets</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More funding for police</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritize promoting detectives and officers from within existing police ranks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GQR March 2024 Pennsylvania survey commissioned by Vera Action
LESSON # 4.
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:
I will prioritize keeping law-abiding Pennsylvanians safe and end the revolving door that releases violent criminals back onto the streets. I will make prosecutors do their jobs and enforce all the laws. I stand with the police and will provide resources to rebuild departments that have lost officers due to a lack of support and low morale. I will stand up to politicians who allow repeat criminals out of jail and who want to defund the police. I will restore law and order in Pennsylvania.

DEMOCRAT “I TOO AM TOUGH ON CRIME” RESPONSE:
I am committed to keeping communities safe and reducing crime. I support adding more police to our communities and giving them more funding. I want to give police and prosecutors the tools to solve and prosecute homicides and other violent crimes. I support tougher bail laws to make sure repeat offenders do not get early release from prison, and I support strict penalties for convicted drug dealers to stop the flow of drugs into our communities.

DEMOCRAT “I AM SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY” RESPONSE:
I am serious about safety. I will make communities safer with real solutions that prevent crime by investing in good schools, affordable housing, mental health and drug addiction treatment, and good jobs. We must hold people accountable when they break the law and build a system that treats everyone fairly. I will support the police, while also holding them accountable if they abuse their power. I will get illegal guns off the street and focus police resources on solving the most serious cases.

Source: GQR March 2024 Pennsylvania survey commissioned by Vera Action
Now, I am going to read you statements that Democrats and Republicans are making about addressing crime and public safety in Pennsylvania. Which of the following statements do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?

### 'SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY' AND 'ALSO TOUGH' LINES PERFORM THE SAME AGAINST A GOP ATTACK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OVERALL</th>
<th>CD-12</th>
<th>DEMS</th>
<th>INDEP</th>
<th>BIDEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GOP ATTACK</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEM “ALSO TOUGH”</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OVERALL</th>
<th>CD-12</th>
<th>DEMS</th>
<th>INDEP</th>
<th>BIDEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GOP ATTACK</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEM “SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY”</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GQR March 2024 Pennsylvania survey commissioned by Vera Action
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.

**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.

Source: Perry Undem and Hart Research Associates summer 2022 poll commissioned by Vera Action
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=VN6zIrXQszE

#2
Dem candidate touting support for police, police endorsements, and gun control measures

Democratic Candidate
Nadarius Clark
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgDu65zyvT0

#3
Dem candidate touting comprehensive approach and being ‘serious about safety’

Mock ad for a Democratic candidate
https://vimeo.com/912348236/4be896715d?share=copy

Source: HIT Strategies post-election December 2023 Virginia survey commissioned by Vera Action
Which ad is most aligned with your views?

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

Source: HIT Strategies post-election December 2023 Virginia survey commissioned by Vera Action
FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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