

VeraACTION

Public Safety on Our Own Terms:

Proactive Messaging and
Effective Responses
to Weaponized Attacks on
Crime and Safety

As midterms near, Republicans are doubling down on crime and safety as an attack. It's effective, given the emotions this issue inspires.

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

Syllabus

DOBBS, STATE HEALTH OFFICER OF THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, ET AL. JACKSON WOMEN'S HEALTH ORGANIZATION ET

CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

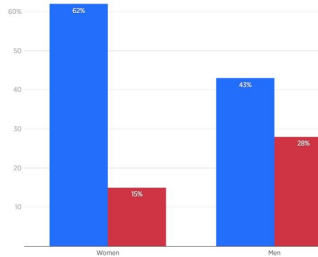
No. 19–1392. Argued December 1, 2021. Decided June 24, 2022

Latest results on Kansa
Vote margin in counties voting

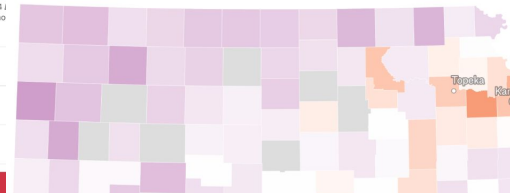
Vote share as of 12:25 a.m. Eastern
No Yes

In Pennsylvania, 62% of women registering since Dobbs registered as Democrats, 15% as Republicans; 54% were younger than 25.

Of the Women Who Registered to Vote in Pa. After Dobbs, There Are Four Democrats For Every Republican



Does not include third-party and independent voters. Chart: KUNATHAN LAI / Source: TargetSmart



A yes vote for the would protect this
FiveThirtyEight

Outside dollars help Republican U.S. Senate candidates close financial gap with Democrats

House Democrats pass police funding bills despite divisions

By FARNOUSH AMIRI September 23, 2022

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

News Sports Politics Opinion Personal Finance Betting Obituaries

ELECTIONS

'No' prevails: Kansas votes to protect abortion rights in state constitution

BY KATIE BERNARD AND LISA GUTIERREZ

UPDATED AUGUST 05, 2022 5:23 PM

ELECTIONS

Midterm voters key in on crime

Crime and public safety are proving to be a potent mix of issues in the midterm election.



AD HAMMERS PENNSYLVANIA DEMOCRAT JOHN FETTERMAN OVER EMPTYING PRISONS RHETORIC



KATHY HOCHUL IS NOT UP TO FIGHTING CRIME

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

June 2022

October 2022

SEPTEMBER 2022 AD SPENDING:

\$60M on abortion

\$33M on crime

VeraACTION

1. TALK ABOUT CRIME & SAFETY

Pivoting to abortion, democracy, or other issues alone won't work. Democrats won't win if they are seen as indifferent to or avoiding issues of crime and safety.

6 Which one of these issues will be most important in determining your vote for US Senate in November?

677 Likely Voters	All	Gender		Age			
		Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Credibility Interval: ± 4.4 pct points							
Health Care	9%	10%	8%	13%	7%	10%	8%
Economy	44%	47%	41%	37%	45%	52%	40%
Education	3%	3%	4%	4%	6%	3%	1%
Public Safety/crime	5%	5%	5%	6%	4%	4%	6%
Guns	5%	6%	5%	5%	8%	4%	5%
Immigration	8%	10%	6%	8%	5%	2%	16%
Abortion	17%	11%	23%	16%	20%	17%	16%
Taxes	3%	4%	3%	4%	2%	4%	3%
Other	5%	4%	6%	7%	4%	4%	5%

PENNSYLVANIA SENATE

Pennsylvania Senate Moves Back to Toss Up

October 4, 2022



Jessica Taylor
@JessicaTaylor

When we shifted our Pennsylvania Senate rating to Lean Democrat about six weeks ago, we included this key caveat — Republican spending against Democratic nominee John Fetterman had yet to ramp up, and that

Latest

Just In...

Sanders calls on Dems to focus on more than abortion ahead of midterms

SENATE - 5M 3S AGO

CAMPAIGN

Wisconsin Senate race shifts toward Johnson: poll

BY ZACH SCHONFELD - 09/29/22 8:33 PM ET

f SHARE t TWEET

There is a small but important group of undecided voters for whom crime and safety are a top priority. How do Democrats message effectively to win them over?

Vera Action poll on effective messaging about crime and safety

Vera Action did a national survey of n = 3,876 likely 2022 voters, including:

- N = 473 Black voters
- N = 411 Latina/o/x voters
- N = 459 Asian-American / Pacific-Islander voters
- N = 1,245 battleground state voters (AZ, FL, GA, MI, MN, NC, NH, NV, OR, PA, WI)

The survey was conducted from June 2 - 17, 2022 using YouGov's online panel. The sample includes likely voters from across the political spectrum, including Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. The margin of sampling error for total: \pm 2 percentage points.

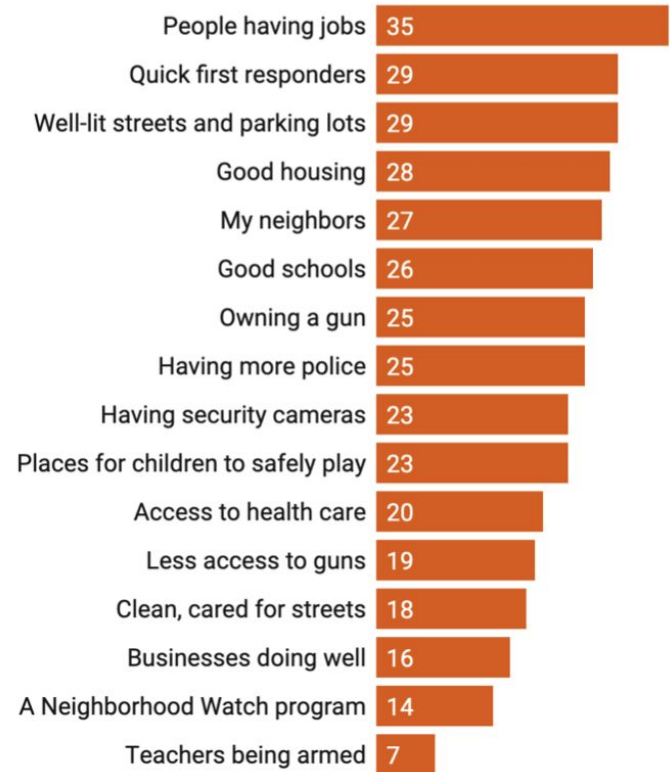
This messaging research is referenced several times throughout this deck.

Likely voters identified a range of factors that contribute to stability and neighborhood safety.

Think about being safe in your own neighborhood and community. What makes you feel safe? Choose the top 3 or 4 for you.

The top factors likely voters chose include:

- Jobs
- Housing
- Schools
- Quick first responders
- Well-lit streets and parking lots



Only Republicans and conservative independents ranked “more police” as one of their 3-4 priorities for safety.

	Women	Men	Black	Latinx	AAPI	White	18 to 34	Metro	Non-metro
Having more police		27%							
	Dem women	Dem men	Ind women	Ind men	Rep women	Rep men			
Having more police				27%	37%	42%			
	Liberal Dems	Other Dems	Ind	Liberal / mod ind	Cons ind	Swing	Battle-grnd	Battle-grnd ind	
Having more police					39%				

2. MESSAGE ON OUR OWN TERMS

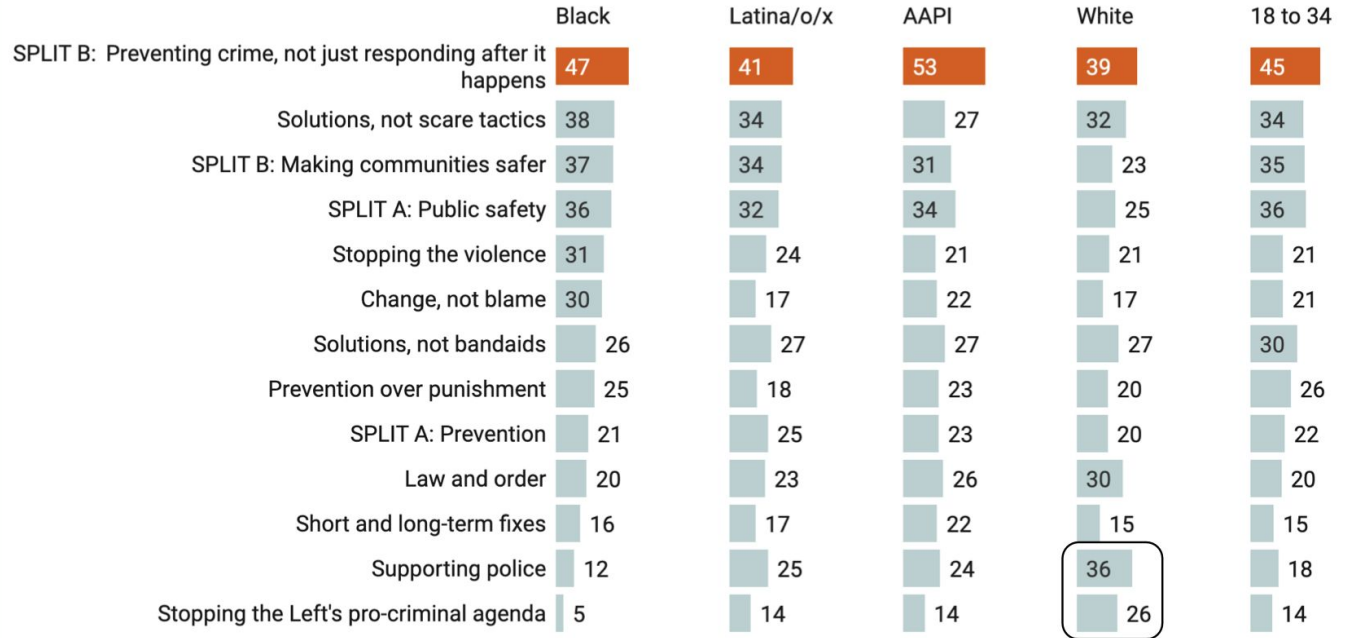
Democrats must frame what safety is on their own terms. Using “law and order” or “tough on crime” language alone won’t work. Even when playing defense against attacks, voters need to hear a strong vision for safe communities.

**How do Democrats
message to “stanching
the bleeding” in these
final four weeks?**

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.



3. USE A CATCH PHRASE/BRAND

Democrats need a brand on crime and public safety that resonates with a wide spectrum of voters. “Preventing crime, not just reacting after it happens” and saying you’re here for “Solutions, not scare tactics” work well with *all* voters.

**What messages work to
affirmatively message about
preventing crime and
delivering safety – on the
offense and defense?**

DEMOCRATIC NARRATIVE

Crime is rising and many of us are feeling less safe. While some politicians will try to divide us, my focus is fixing the problems. Let's look at solutions that reduce crime, increase safety, and serve the community.

Here's what we can do. In the short-term, new breakthroughs in gun violence and crime prevention programs are showing major success now. We need to fund and replicate these programs. Police have dangerous and hard jobs. Let's support police officers who put their lives on the line for us every day. Let's make sure our first responders get better training, like how to de-escalate situations. We also have to stop the flood of illegal handguns and ghost guns that are coming into our communities.

In addition to fighting crime, we need to work on preventing it in the first place. We already have some answers on that. The safest places in America don't have more police, more jails, more prisons, and harsher sentences. They have access to jobs and opportunities. They have good schools. There's housing and health care. There's good infrastructure. There's hope for the future. We need to fully fund things that are proven to create safe neighborhoods. Everyone deserves to work, play, and raise their children in safety. Instead of trying to stir up people's emotions just to get elected, I'll do my job to fix problems and keep people safe.

REPUBLICAN NARRATIVE

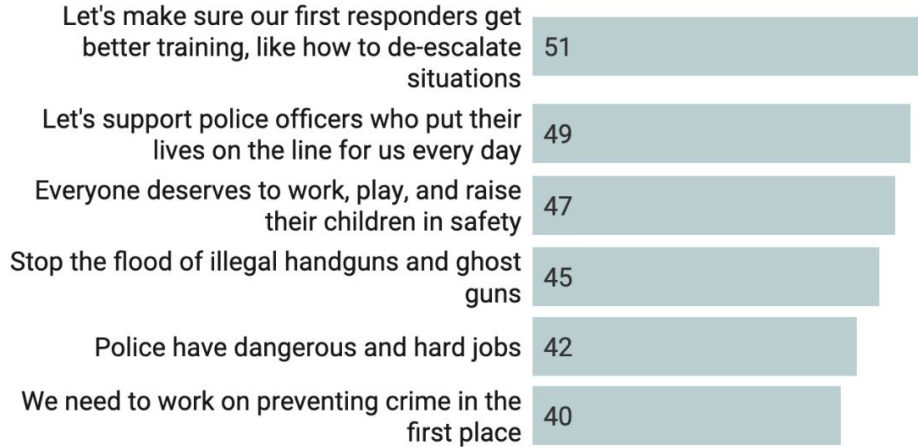
Crime has been on the rise for three years and we're reaching historic spikes in homicides, gang activity, motor vehicle thefts, and assaults. From the White House to liberal state and local governments, there has been a systemic failure to contain crime in America. It stems from the dangerous belief that enforcing the law is somehow morally wrong or even racist. It has paralyzed law enforcement agencies at all levels and created prosecutors who would rather let a dangerous criminal walk out of jail than enforce the law.

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. We need to stop subsidizing the Left's pro-criminal agenda. We need to rein in rogue prosecutors who are declining to prosecute types of cases or charge certain crimes. We need to stop federal funds to states that have "no cash bail" laws on the books.

Once again, Democrats have broken a part of our civil society, and once again it will be conservatives who will step up to piece it together.

A positive, solutions-oriented message outperforms the opposition's "scare tactics" when compared head-to-head.

% Agreed with most (Text highlight exercise)



Even with “defund” attacks, a solutions-oriented response performs better with likely voters than “scare tactics.”

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 (GOP): 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%

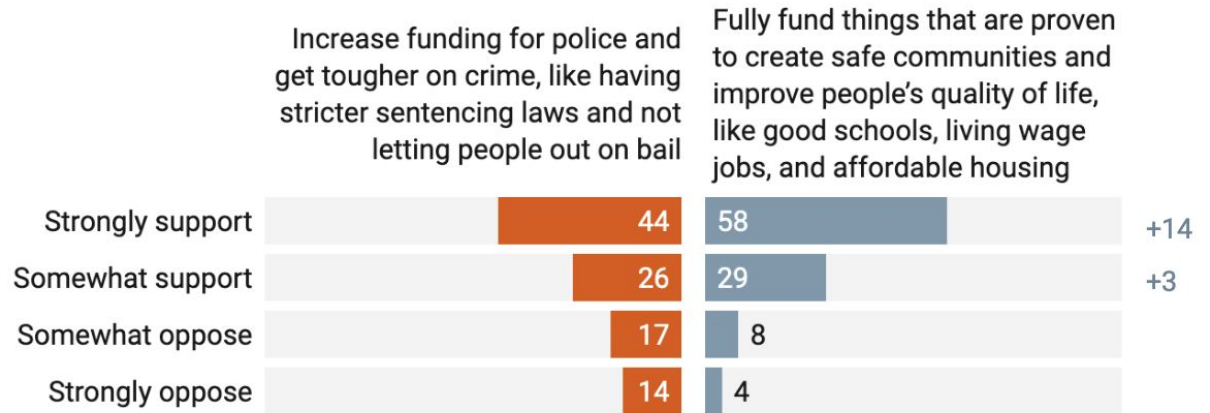
Candidate B (Dem): I’m not about scare tactics or slogans, and I’m not afraid to have an honest conversation. We keep expecting police to solve every social problem, from kids skipping school to mental illness to homelessness to gun violence. No one profession can do that. We’re spending \$115 billion 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%

When asked to pick a soundbite, likely voters support a “solutions” approach over a “law and order” one.

Here are two ways we could work on crime.

First, would you support or oppose this way:



A “solutions” narrative outperforms “scare tactics” in all regions of the country, including the midwest and south.



4. MESSAGE ABOUT SOLUTIONS

Talking about “solutions” outperforms the opposition’s approach of “scare tactics” –both when affirmatively taking a position and when responding to attacks. Talk about solutions in a policy platform, a debate answer, or a soundbite.

Messaging with a positive, solutions-oriented frame

1. Unite by leading with a **shared vision of safety** for everyone and lean into the emotion that everyone deserves to be safe.
2. Point out that the **status quo is the enemy** and it doesn't make us safer. We need to prevent crime in the first place, not just react to it after.
3. Acknowledge what many people need to hear about safety – that there is both **accountability and action**. We are here for solutions, not scare tactics.
4. Avoid reinforcing the opposition's frame by simply denying their attacks. Pivot to **concrete solutions** that are proven to make us safe.
5. Inspire hope by having **honest conversations** with voters about safety and harness the emotion of this issue to achieve some good.

Tested messaging in action:

“I Know What it
Takes to Keep our
Neighborhoods Safe”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZ9t6cTeyyq>



**What about defund the police?
Accountability? Solutions for
safety? A few more specific
tested messages to use for a
positive vision of preventing
crime and delivering safety.**

Lay out a positive vision for public 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.

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

92%

agree

62%

strongly

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

Acknowledge that support for police is strong, but so is support for accountability when they abuse their power.

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.

When it comes to accountability, most voters 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.

Highlight specific solutions that are proven to make communities safer – community violence intervention, treatment, and mental health first responders.

81%
agree

54%
strongly

Fully fund things that are proven to create safe communities and improve people's quality of life – like good schools, living wage jobs, and affordable housing.

5. OWN ACCOUNTABILITY & ACTION

Voters want elected leaders to do their jobs and make communities safe. They want solutions and not scare tactics. We have a unique moment to lean into the emotions around issues of crime and safety to have an honest conversation with voters.

For questions, please contact:

Insha Rahman, irahman@vera.org

Vice President of Advocacy & Partnerships and Vera Action