

WE NEED TO BE 'SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY,' NOT 'TOUGH ON CRIME':

Winning the narrative on safety, accountability, and justice

April 2024

Vera ACTION

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 scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

SAFETY
ACCOUNTIBILITY
JUSTICE

WHAT DEMOCRATS
STAND FOR

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

THIS DEFIES CONVENTIONAL POLITICAL WISDOM, BUT 'SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY' BEATS 'TOUGH ON CRIME'



IN THE 2022 MIDTERMS,

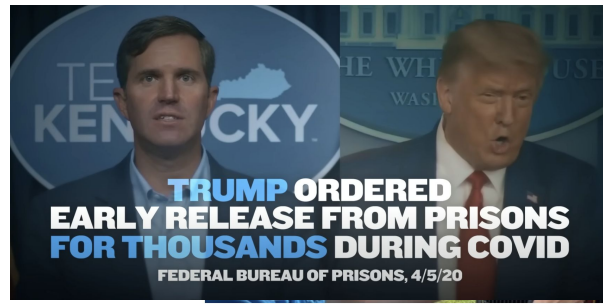
\$157M SPENT ON
CRIME ATTACK ADS

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

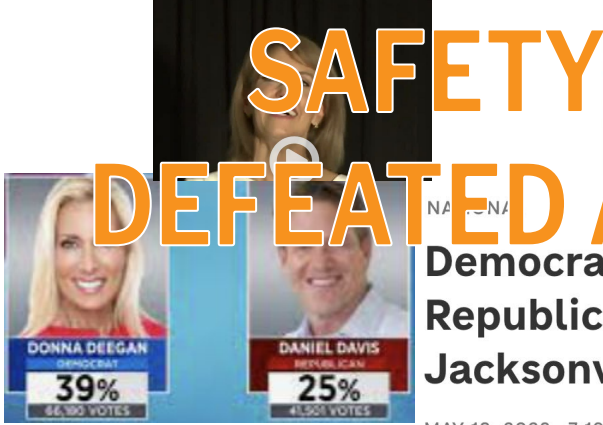
Mandela Barnes, the party's Senate candidate, is now wobbling in his race against Ron Johnson, the Republican incumbent. Democratic nominees in other states face similar challenges.

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Vera ACTION



Political ads spark clash over Lincoln crime statistics



Democrat upsets DeSantis-backed Republican mayoral candidate in Jacksonville

MAY 18, 2023 · 7:19 AM ET

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.

Intelligencer
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



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

TAKEAWAY # 1.

Get out in front of the “soft-on-crime” attack with a strong message about preventing crime, responding to crisis, and stopping violence.

VOTERS FAVOR A SAFETY MESSAGE OVER A TOUGH ONE

Which statement comes closer to your view about how crime and public safety should be handled?

(SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY) 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 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.

BG:
55%

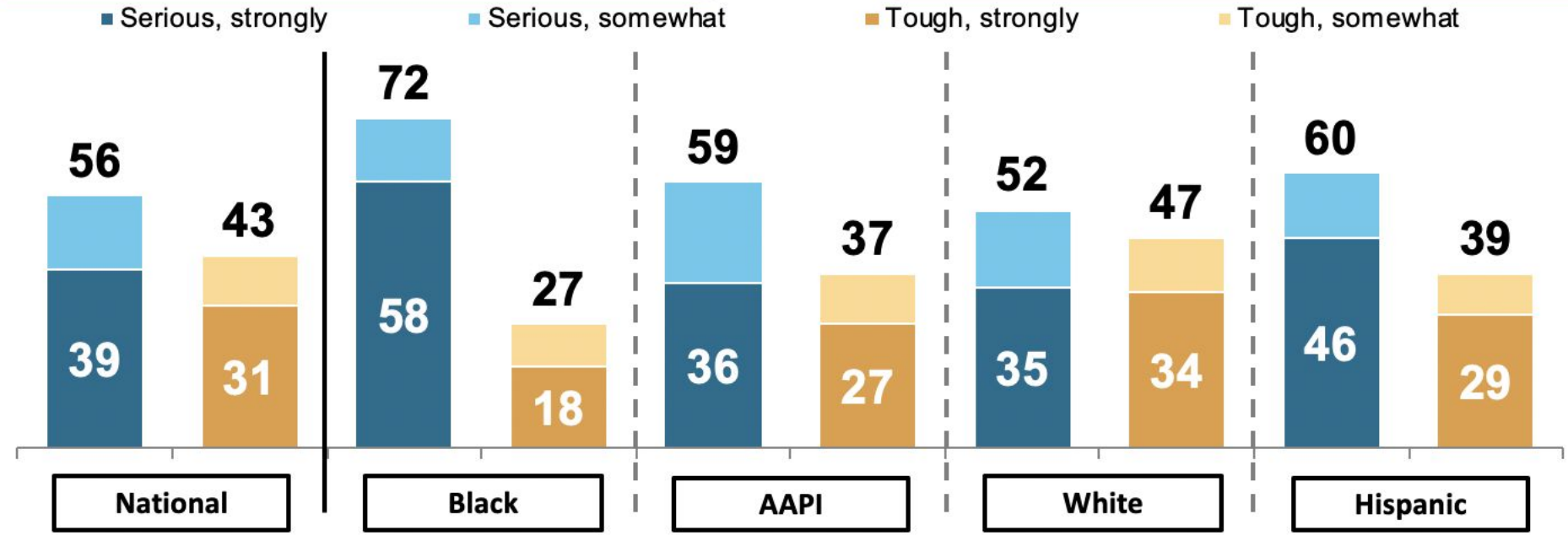
MI:
57%

PA:
54%

BG:
45%

MI:
40%

PA:
43%



TAKEAWAY # 2.

**A 'serious about safety' messages
wins over Black voters and holds
moderate and independent voters.**

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>

‘SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY’ BEATS ‘TOUGH ON CRIME’ OVERALL, AND ESPECIALLY WITH BLACK VOTERS

Which ad is most aligned with your views?

AD # 1:
GOP
TOUGH



AD # 2:
DEM
TOUGH



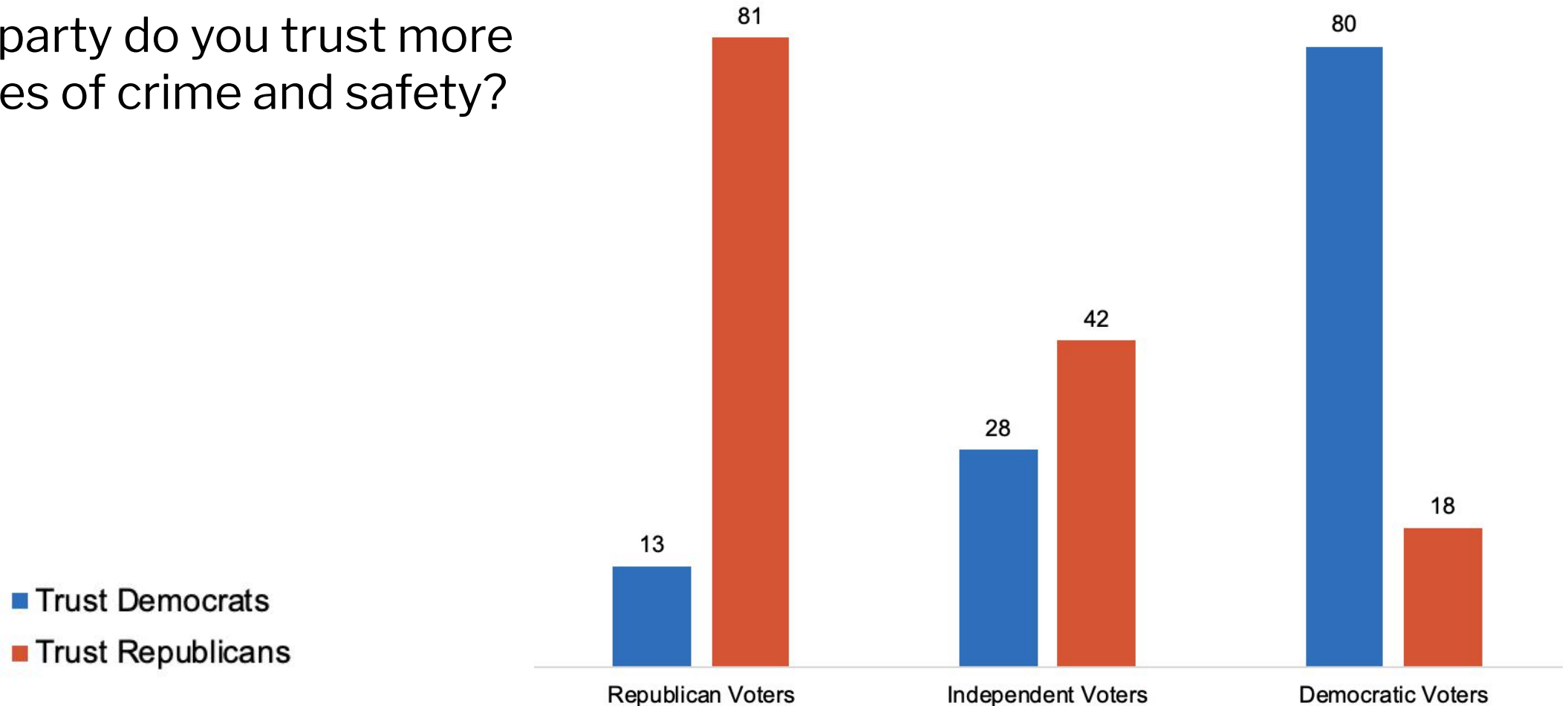
AD # 3:
DEM
SAFETY



	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%

IN VIRGINIA, THE GOP HAS AN ADVANTAGE WITH INDEPENDENT VOTERS ON CRIME AND SAFETY...

Which party do you trust more on issues of crime and safety?



...YET VIRGINIA'S INDEPENDENT VOTERS REJECT 'TOUGH ON CRIME' BY 22 PERCENTAGE POINTS

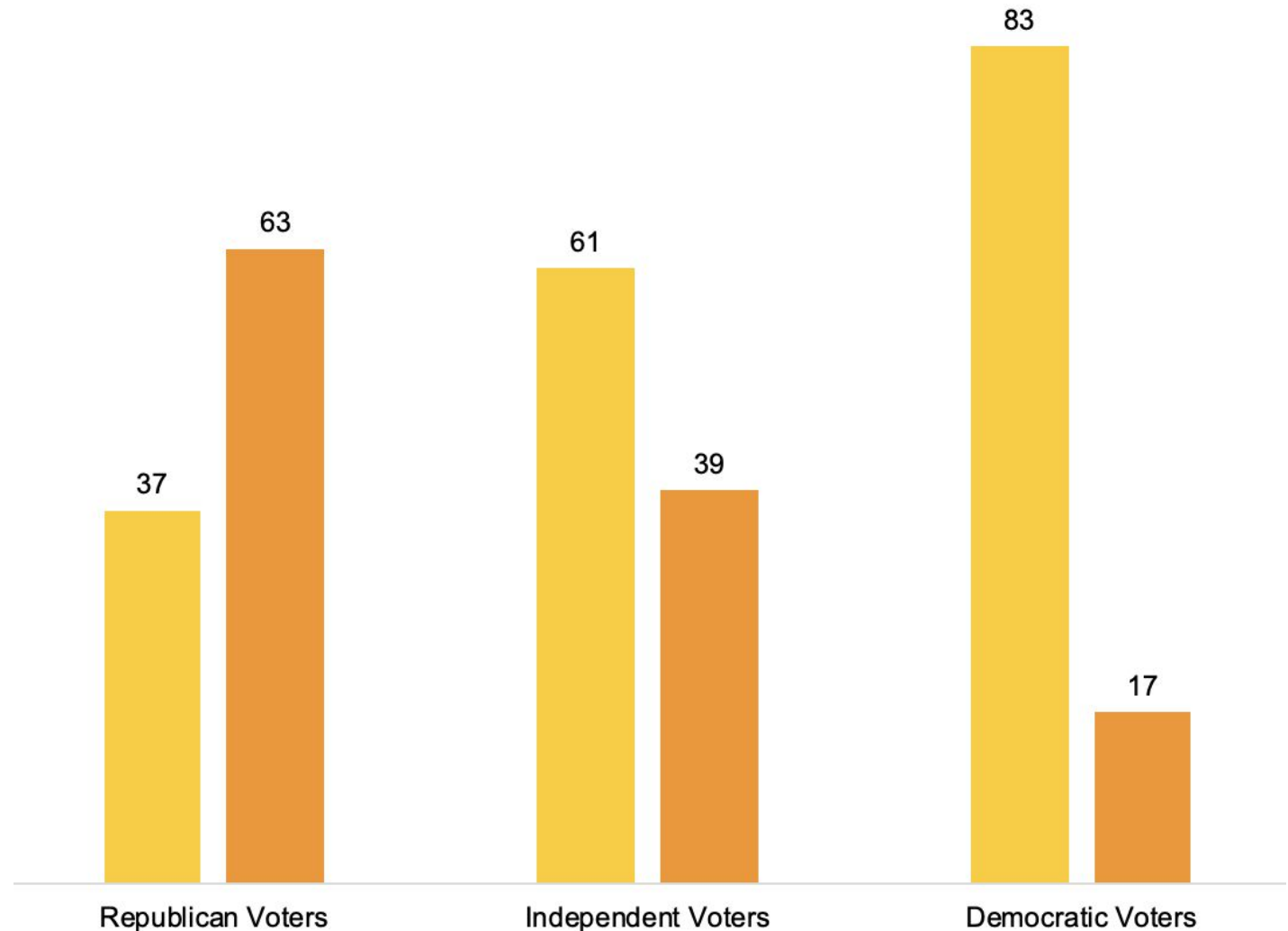
'SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY':

Fully fund things 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 off the street.

'TOUGH ON CRIME':

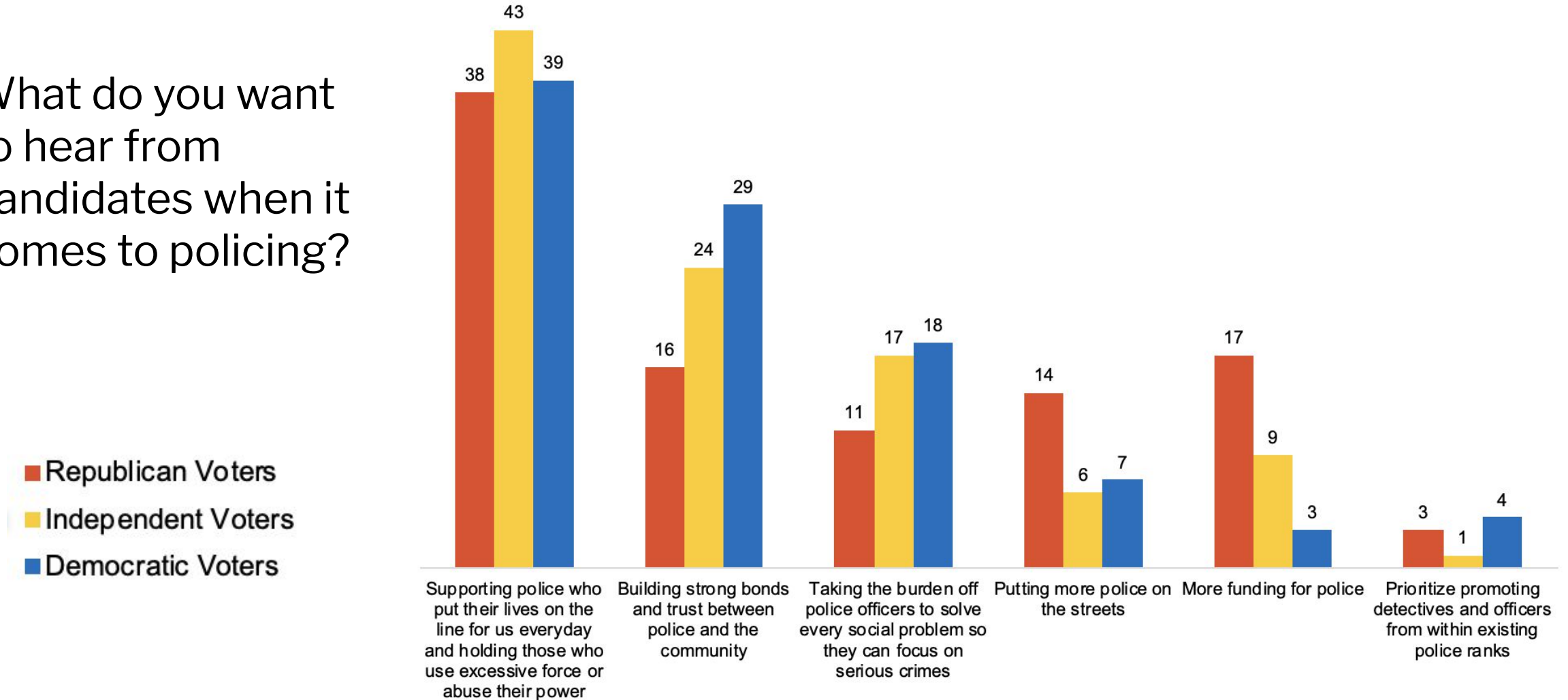
Doing more to get tough on crime, like having tougher sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep potentially dangerous people in jail, and providing police more support and resources.

- Serious about safety
- Tough on crime



BY A SIGNIFICANT MARGIN, ALL VIRGINIA VOTERS FAVOR SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR POLICE

What do you want to hear from candidates when it comes to policing?

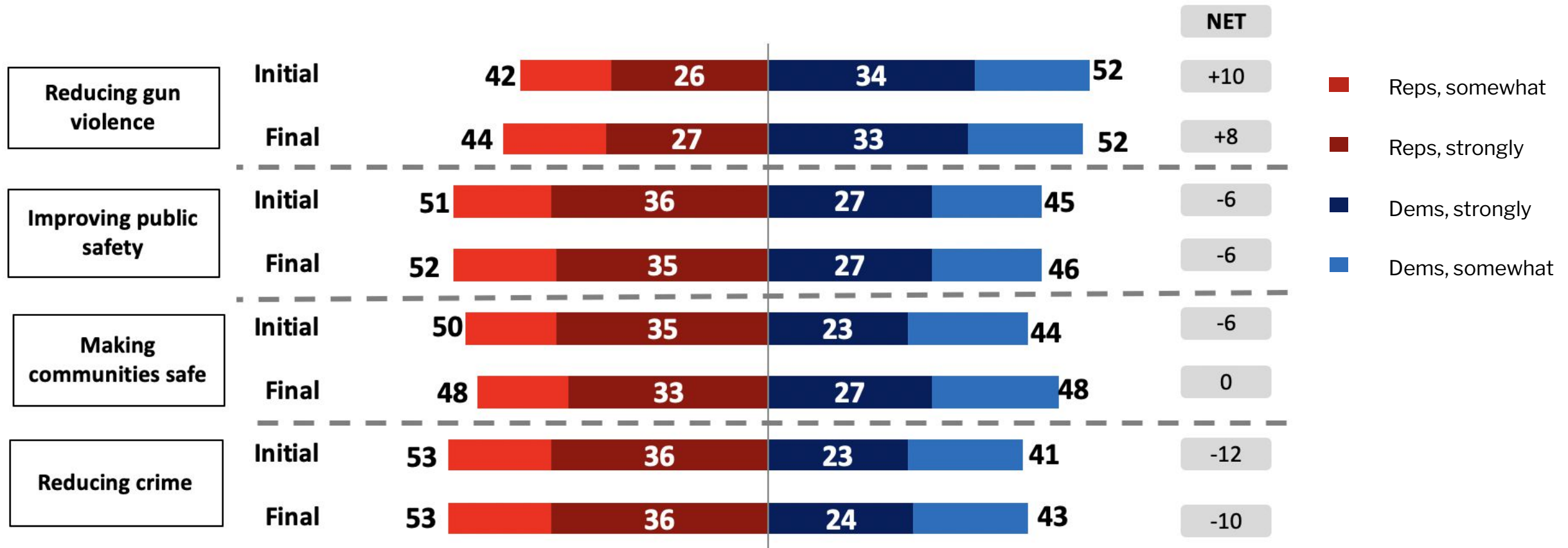


TAKEAWAY # 3.

**Inoculate Against Unserious
Attacks on Defund, Retail Theft, etc.
with a 'Serious' Response**

TO CLOSE THE VOTER TRUST GAP, DEMOCRATS SHOULD LEAD WITH SAFE COMMUNITIES—NOT CRIME

For each aspect, do you trust Democrats or Republicans to do a better job?



AGAINST A 'DEFUND' ATTACK, DEMOCRATS CAN FLIP THE NARRATIVE TO WIN WITH A 'SAFETY' MESSAGE

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%

SIMILARLY, FLIP THE NARRATIVE ON RETAIL THEFT FROM PETTY CRIME TO MAKING COMMUNITIES SAFE

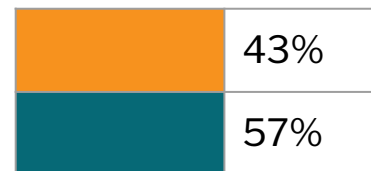
THE ATTACK: We can thank woke prosecutors for letting American cities spiral out of control. People are scared to go into stores because of theft and looting. Hardworking employees and business owners are traumatized and scared to go to work.

Organized retail crime is just happening brazenly. Evil is spreading across the country, with thieves taking whatever they want and prosecutors aren't doing a thing about it. In fact, woke prosecutors are against any charges or prosecutions for theft. There are no consequences and that's why criminals are so open, brazen, and violent with stealing. We've got to get tougher on crime. I'll start by making sure every thief is punished to the full extent of the law.

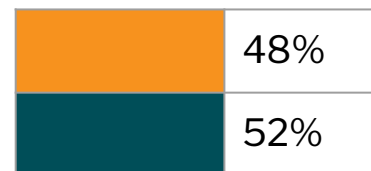
RESPONSE W/ SAFETY: My opponent wants to use scare tactics to rile people up to win votes. Here's what I can tell you. We all deserve to live in safe neighborhoods and shop at places in peace. I will work with police to take down organized theft so that our stores don't have to lock up basics like toothpaste and shampoo. Also, some people are stealing out of desperation and poverty because they're in survival mode. Throwing them in jail or charging them with huge fines will not change their behavior. It will just make them more desperate. My focus is on holding people accountable in ways that actually stop the cycle of crime - and make all of us safer.

RESPONSE W/ FACTCHECK: My opponent wants to use scare tactics to rile people up to win votes. Look at the data. There is not a retail theft epidemic. We should do more to stop theft, but let's tell the truth about the problem and solutions. I will work with police to reduce theft so that our stores don't have to lock up basics like toothpaste and shampoo. Also, some people steal out of desperation and poverty because they're in survival mode. Throwing them in jail or charging them with huge fines will not change their behavior. It will just make them more desperate. My focus is on holding people accountable in ways that actually stop the cycle of crime - and make all of us safer.

HEAD-TO-HEAD ATTACK
V. SAFETY SOLUTIONS



HEAD-TO-HEAD ATTACK
V. FACTCHECK



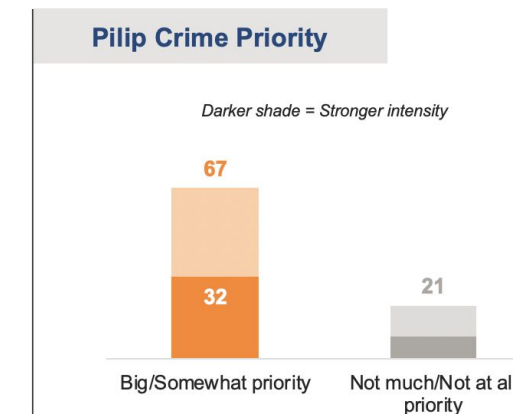
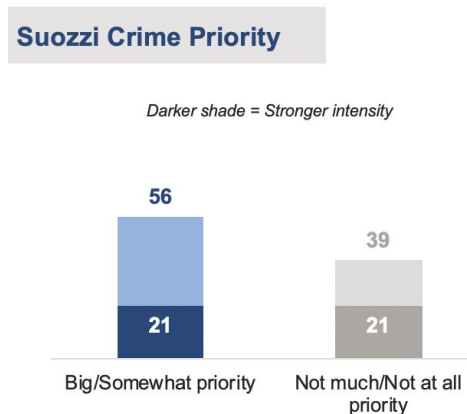
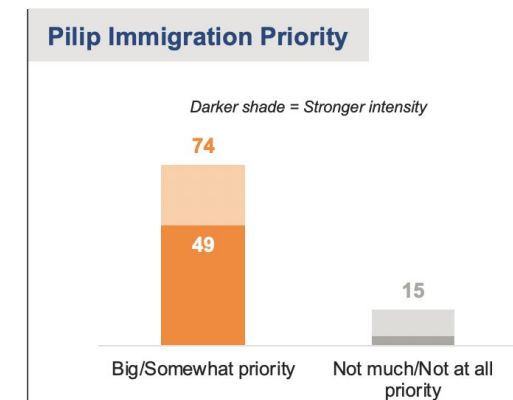
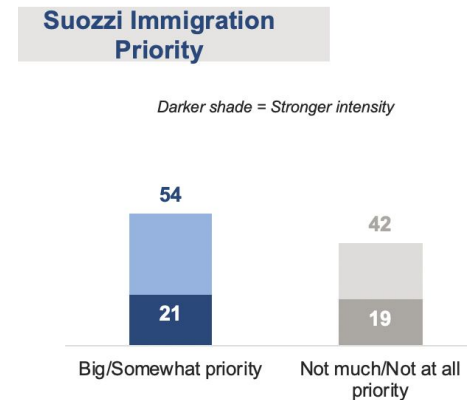


**PROOF WE CAN INOCULATE AND
WIN BY LEANING INTO SAFETY AND
OWNING A 'SERIOUS' MESSAGE**
A deeper dive into the NY-03 results

IN NY-03, IMMIGRATION & CRIME WERE HIGH PRIORITIES AND VOTERS FOUND BOTH CANDIDATES LEANED IN

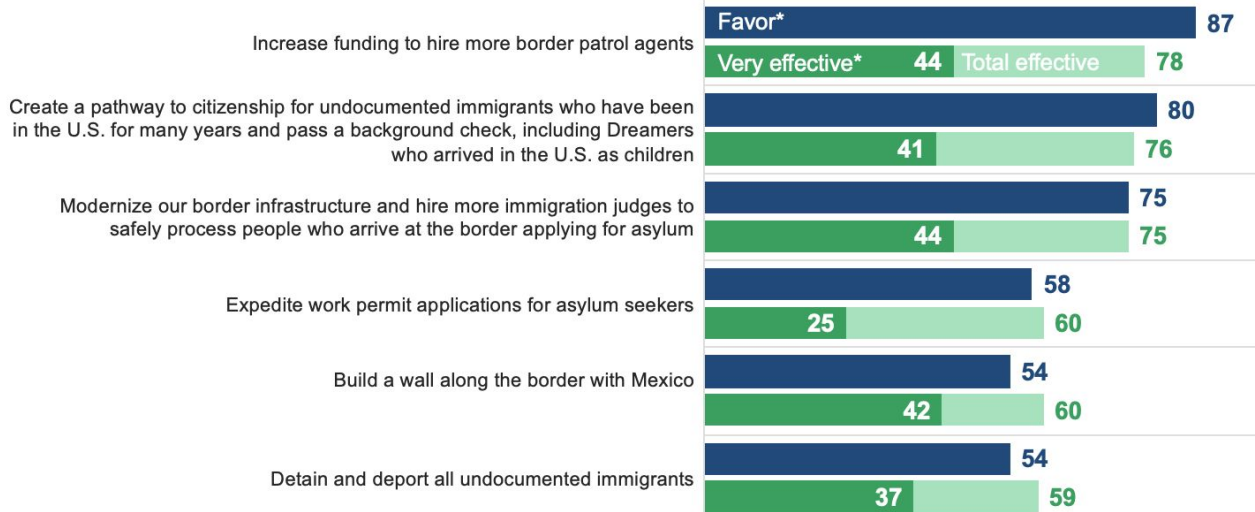
What were your two top voting issues and how much did each candidate make it a priority?

Suozzi Voter	
Abortion	55
Immigration/migrants	34
Guns	23
Considered Both	
Immigration/migrants	70
Inflation/Cost of living	32
Abortion	18
Crime	18
Pilip Voter	
Immigration/migrants	84
Inflation/Cost of living	43
Crime	37



DESPITE THE RELENTLESS ‘SOFT’ ATTACKS ON CRIME AND IMMIGRATION, VOTERS FAVORED REAL SOLUTIONS

Immigration Proposals



Crime Proposals

● Help a lot
 ● Help a lot/Help some





**ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF A
SAFETY MESSAGE WORKING:**

President Biden's evolution from
'tough on crime' to 'serious about safety'
over three State of the Union addresses.

State of the Union 2022

“Let’s not abandon our streets or choose between **safety and equal justice**. Let’s come together and protect our communities, restore trust, and hold law enforcement accountable.

We should all agree the answer is not to defund the police. It’s to fund the police. Fund them. Fund them. Fund them with the resources and training — resources and training they need to protect our communities.”

State of the Union 2023

“We all want the same thing: neighborhoods free of violence, law enforcement who earns the community’s trust.

We know **police officers put their lives on the line** every single night and day. **And we know we ask them, in many cases, to do too much — to be counselors, social workers, psychologists — responding to drug overdoses, mental health crises, and so much more. In one sense, we ask much too much of them.**

But what happened to Tyre in Memphis happens too often. We have to do better. We also need **more first responders and professionals to address the growing mental health, substance abuse challenges.** More resources to reduce violent crime and gun crime. **More community intervention programs. More investments in housing, education, and job training. All this can help prevent violence in the first place.**

And when police officers or police departments **violate the public trust**, they must be held **accountable.**”

State of the Union 2024

“To state the obvious, all Americans **deserve the freedom to be safe.** And America is safer today than when I took office. The year before I took office, murder rates went up 30 percent.

It was then, through my American Rescue Plan Act, that we made the largest investment in public safety ever.

Last year, the murder rate saw the sharpest decrease in history. Violent crime fell to one of its lowest levels in more than 50 years.

But we have more to do. We have to **help cities invest in more community police officers, more mental health workers, more community violence intervention.**”

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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