

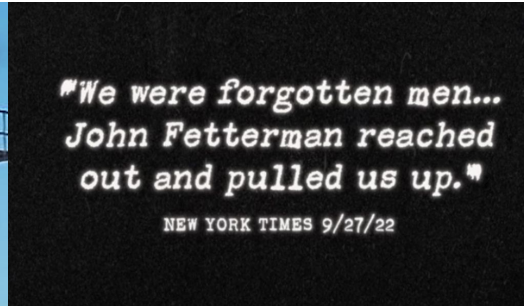
VeraACTION

Winning the Narrative:

Public opinion research and messaging guidance to win the narrative on crime, safety, and justice

**Why lead with a strong,
affirmative vision on crime,
safety, and justice?**

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



POLITICS LAW ENFORCEMENT PENNSYLVANIA MEMPHIS, TN

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.

Public opinion research and surveys referenced in this deck

Vera and Vera Action conducted four rounds of research to understand what matters about crime, safety, 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).

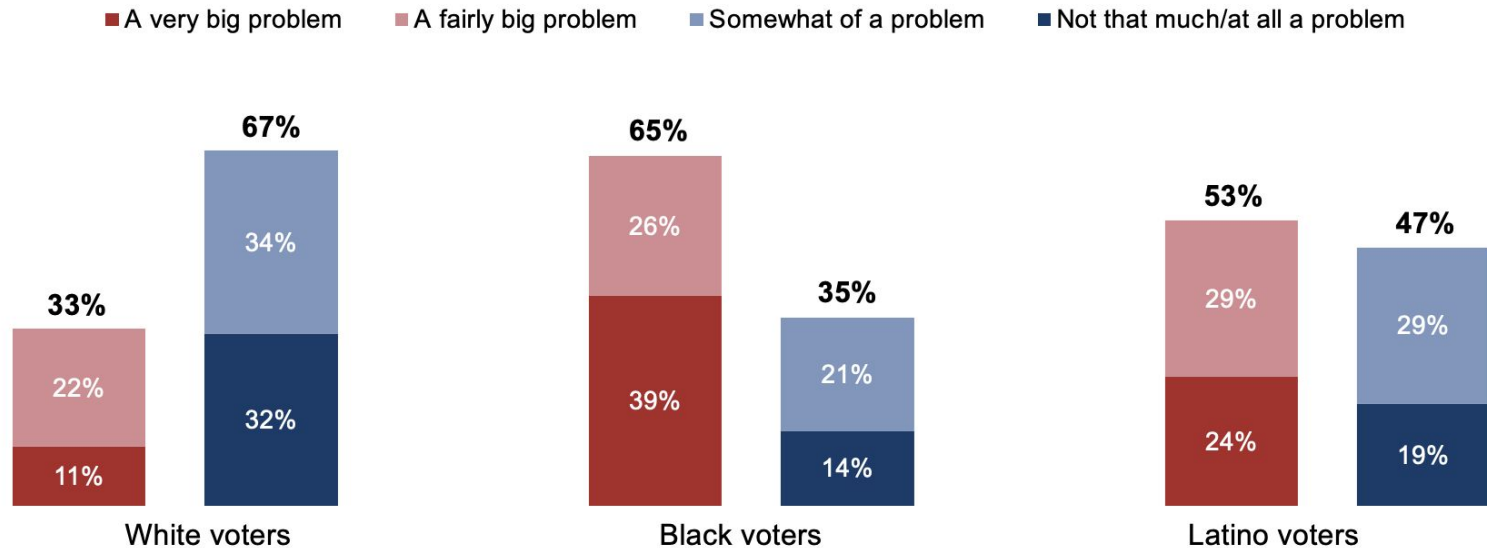
The research surveys captured respondents from across the political spectrum, including Democrats, Independents, and Republicans.

**What does a strong, affirmative
vision for preventing crime,
delivering safety, and promoting
justice look like?**

1. Communities don't have to choose between safety or justice—we can have both.

Crime and safety is a high priority issue overall—and, for Black respondents, it is an issue in their *own community*.

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



Yet those same respondents strongly favor a solutions-oriented approach over more “tough on crime”

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

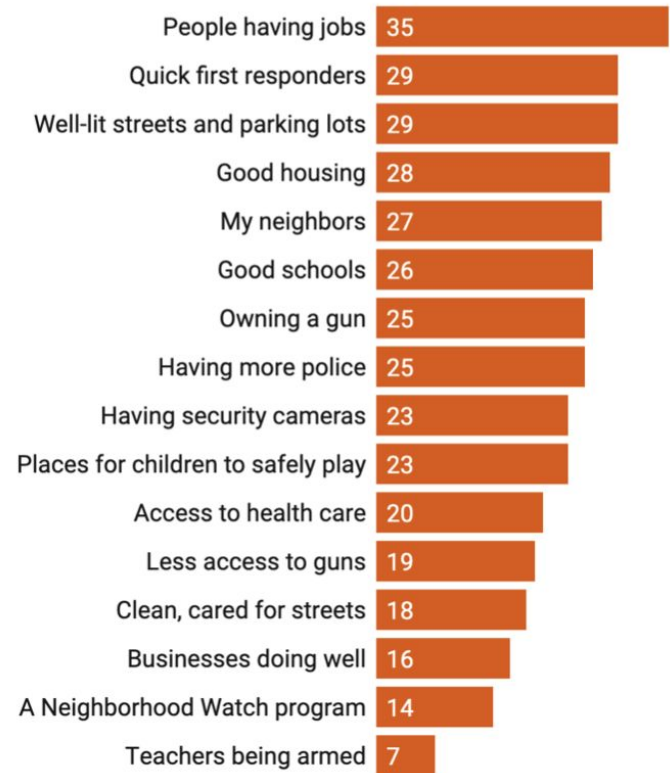
2. Lead with a strong, affirmative vision of preventing crime, delivering safety, and promoting justice.

Respondents 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:

Jobs, housing, and schools are the top structural issues. Other top factors are:

- Quick first responders
- Well-lit streets and parking lots
- Owning a gun
- More police



SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED 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.

TOUGH-ON-CRIME 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.

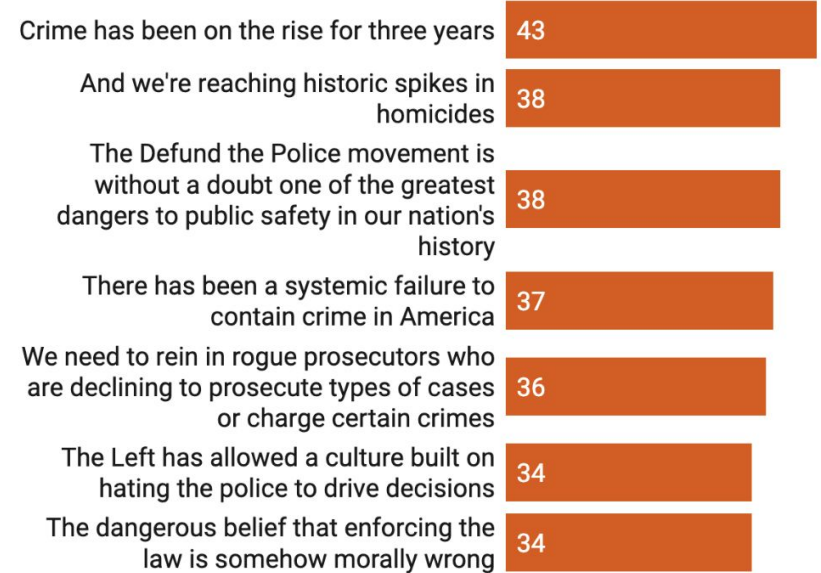
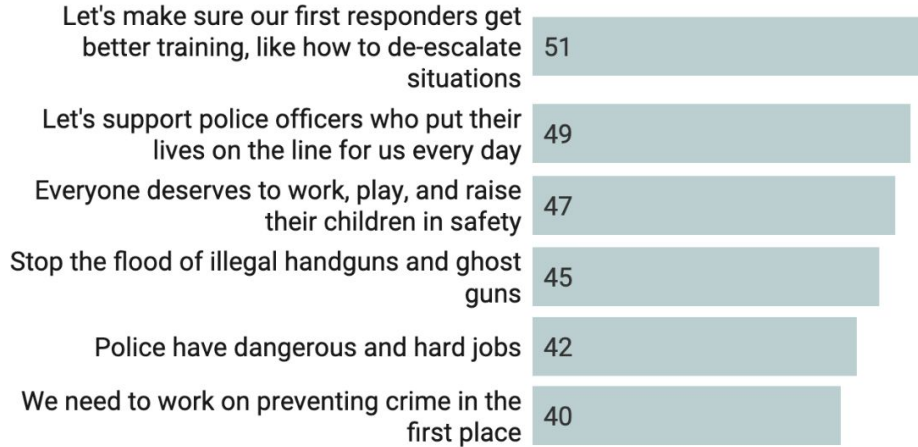
The Left has allowed a culture built on hating the police to drive decisions surrounding law enforcement. The Defund the Police movement is without a doubt one of the greatest dangers to public safety in our nation's history, and Democrats are responsible for it. We need to stop subsidizing the Left's 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)



3. An effective rebuttal to soft-on-crime attacks is to counter with “solutions, not scare tactics.”

“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...”



Which do you agree with more, even if neither is quite right in your view?

Statement A

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

Statement B

Split sampled

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*

Based on Hochul's ad

Most of us are practical and just want our leaders to do their jobs. I'm not interested in the blame game. I don't care what political party you are, I want to work with you to create safe communities. I want to rebuild bonds, trust, and mutual respect in our communities. I want to bring together law enforcement, social service agencies, community leaders, engaged citizens, schools, and experts. I want solutions that work, not just sound bites or scare tactics to get elected. *Base n = 710*

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*

**PERRY
UNDEM**

A solutions-oriented message outperformed the attack *and* performed slightly better than a tough-on-crime response.

% Agree with more

■ Statement A ■ Statement B

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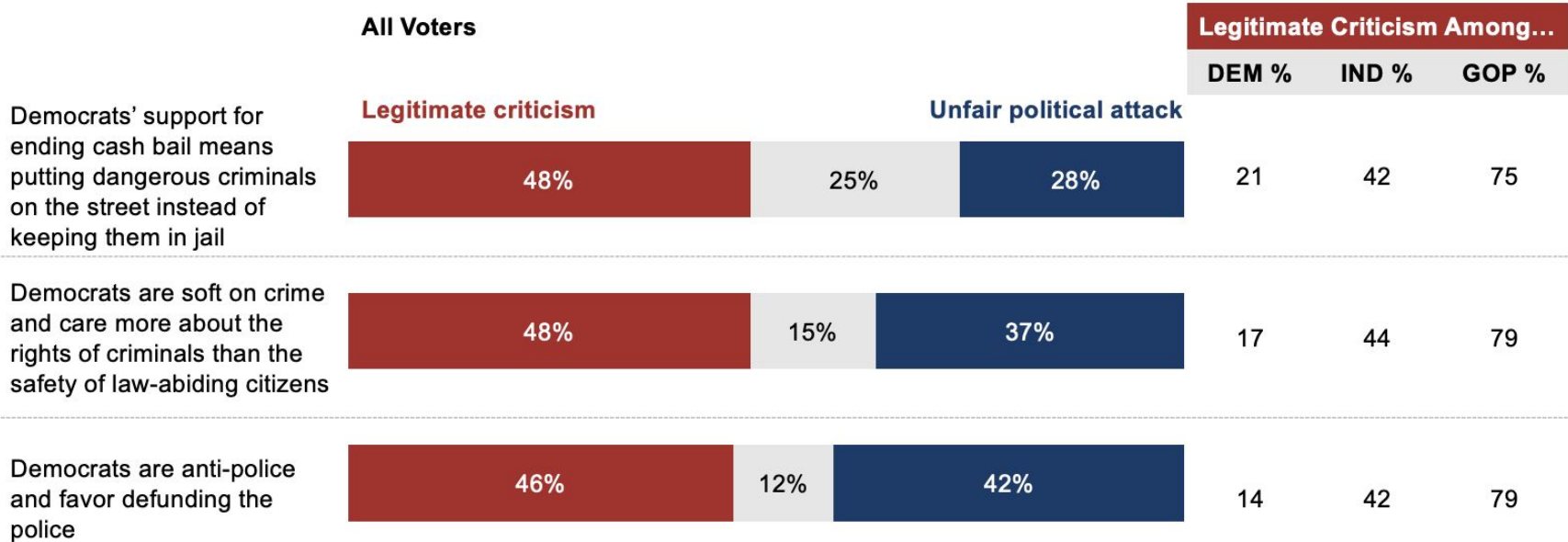
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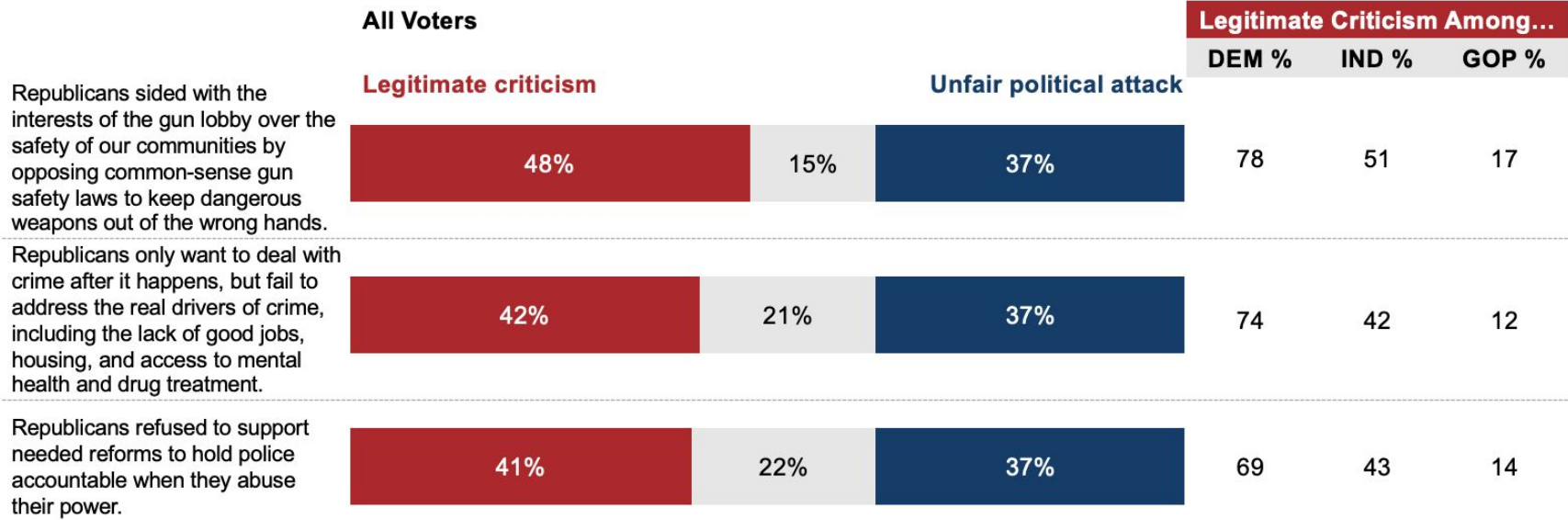
When asked about policies associated with Democrats, many see “defund” as an unfair political attack against the party.



Highest legitimate criticism of Democrats: **Black voters:**
Ending cash bail: **33%**

Highest legitimate criticism of Democrats: **Latino voters:**
Ending cash bail (**40%**) and being soft on crime (**39%**)

When asked about policies associated with Republicans, many are concerned the party sides with the gun lobby.



All three are legitimate criticisms for **Black voters**: siding with gun lobby (**64%**), failing to deal with drivers (**62%**), refusing to hold police accountable (**61%**)

Top legitimate criticisms for **Latino voters**: Siding with gun lobby (**59%**) and refusing to hold police accountable (**56%**)



4. Solutions that prevent crime in the first place, and don't just react in the aftermath, are popular.

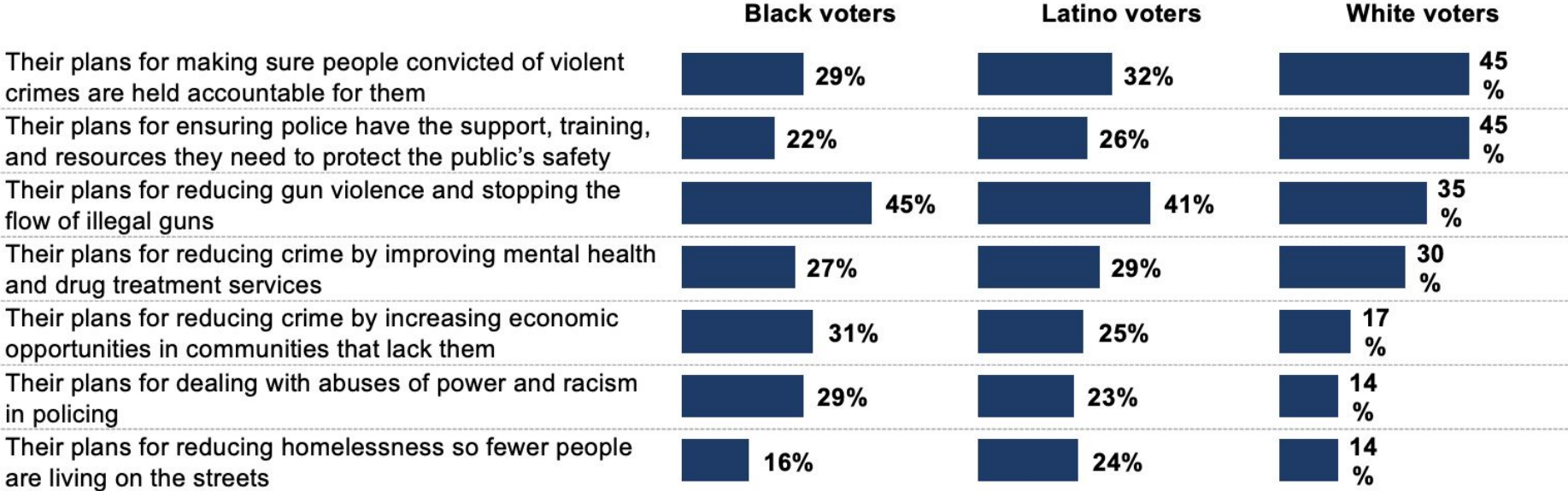
Preferred overall approach to safety differs significantly by party, but there is common ground on treatment and services.

Combined top two most important issues for a candidate to address when it comes to crime, violence, and public safety

	All Voters	DEM %	IND %	GOP %
Their plans for making sure people convicted of violent crimes are held accountable for them	41%	24	40	58
Their plans for ensuring police have the support, training, and resources they need to protect the public's safety	40%	23	41	55
Their plans for reducing gun violence and stopping the flow of illegal guns	37%	56	37	20
Their plans for reducing crime by improving mental health and drug treatment services	29%	32	25	28
Their plans for reducing crime by increasing economic opportunities in communities that lack them	20%	26	24	13
Their plans for dealing with abuses of power and racism in policing	16%	24	19	9
Their plans for reducing homelessness so fewer people are living on the streets	16%	16	15	16

When asked what policies most effectively prevent and address crime, Black respondents especially favor a solutions approach.

% Two most important topics for candidates to address when it comes to dealing with crime, violence, and public safety



**5. Americans support the police
and holding them
accountable if they abuse
their power or break the law.**

There is strong support for better solutions, better policing, and better accountability—across the political spectrum.

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%

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.

How do we tie this together as a unified, clear message on crime, safety, and justice?

A new approach to messaging on crime, safety, and justice

1. **Acknowledge the importance of safety** and say you're engaging in an honest conversation.
2. **Lead with a vision for preventing crime and delivering safety** and use phrases such as, "We need to prevent crime in the first place, not just react after," and "I am about solutions, not scare tactics."
3. Most Americans view the police favorably but also support wise deployment of public resources and accountability. An effective frame is to say, "**We need to use our resources wisely and deploy the right tools for each situation. Send civilian first responders to address mental health crises. Support the police to solve serious crime. And hold officers accountable if they abuse their power.**" Support for police can equal better training, skills, and oversight, not simply more funding.
4. The public strongly supports more investment in community-based solutions for safety. **Highlight those solutions as part of a comprehensive approach to crime-fighting and making communities safe.** Use examples of programs like community violence intervention, mental health first responders, affordable housing for justice-involved people, and mental health and drug treatment.
5. Support for justice reform policies remains high, so **remind audiences that we can have both safety and justice** if attacked as "soft on crime" for championing reform.

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