

WINNING NEW YORK'S VOTERS ON SAFETY

Messaging and policy takeaways from public opinion research
on what New York voters bring to the ballot box on crime and public safety

November 2025

Vera ACTION

Our main takeaways about voters in NY

- Democrats underperform on crime
- Majority of New York state voters prefer a comprehensive approach
- Democrats running with a comprehensive vision perform better than “tough on crime” Democrats
- Democrats should go on the offense, not avoid the issue

TAKEAWAY #1

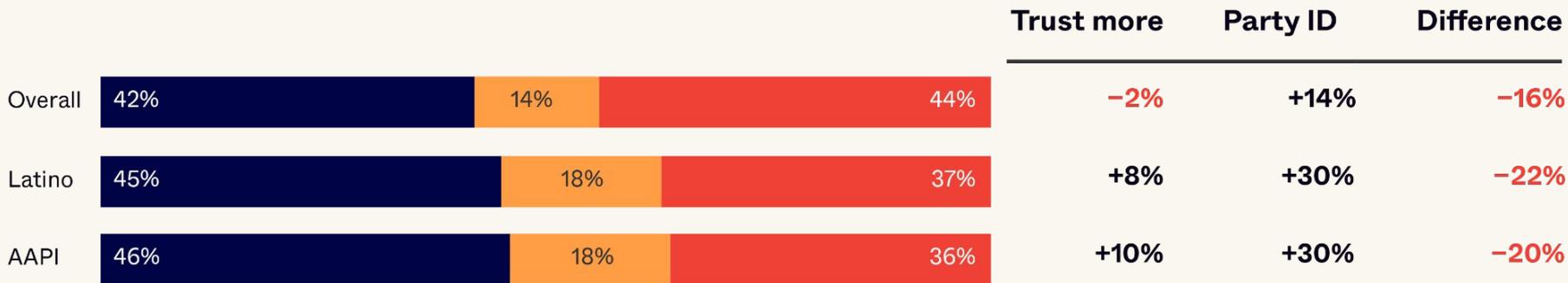
Democrats underperform on crime.

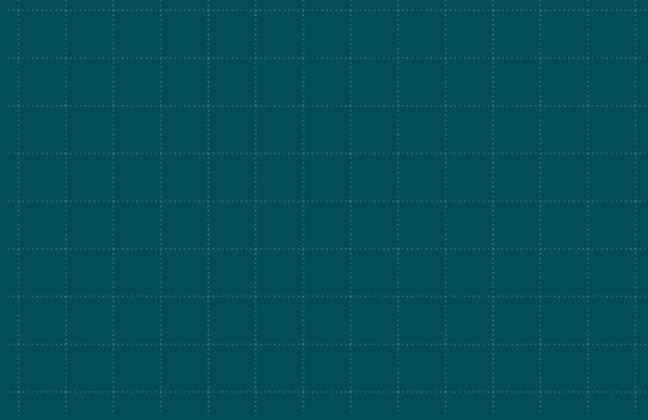
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Democrats run significantly behind partisanship on public safety, particularly among Latino and AAPI voters

Which party do you trust more when it comes to improving safety in communities, the Democrats or the Republicans, or is there no difference?

■ Republicans
 ■ No difference
 ■ Democrats



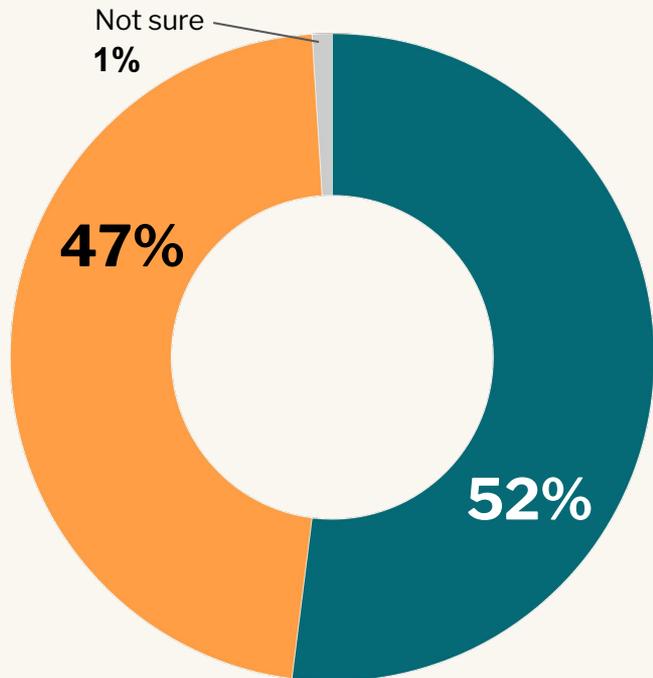


TAKEAWAY #2

A majority of New York state voters prefer a comprehensive approach.

Conventional political wisdom suggests voters concerned about crime want a “tough on crime” approach, but the data shows “prevention” wins

Which do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right in your opinion?



[TOUGH ON CRIME] We should do more to get tough on crime—like having longer sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep dangerous people behind bars, and providing police with more support and resources.

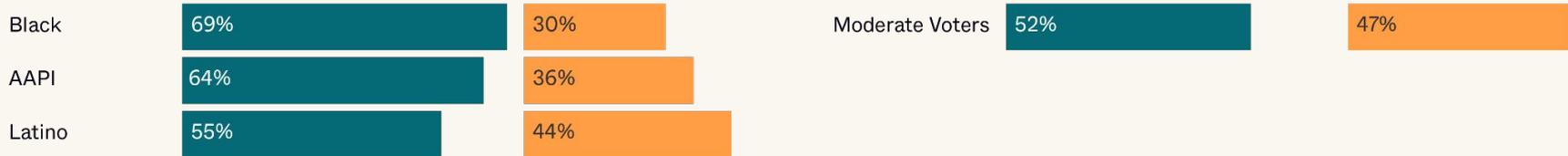
[PREVENTION] We should fully fund things that are proven to create safe communities—like good schools, jobs, and affordable housing—and help prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and by getting illegal guns off the street.

Majority support a “prevention” approach over ‘tough on crime’” across multiple demographics

Which do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right in your opinion?

[PREVENTION] We should fully fund things that are proven to create safe communities—like good schools, jobs, and affordable housing—and help prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and by getting illegal guns off the street.

[TOUGH ON CRIME] We should do more to get tough on crime—like having longer sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep dangerous people behind bars, and providing police with more support and resources.



Across race and key targets, action on guns and expanding mental health access are considered most effective in improving safety

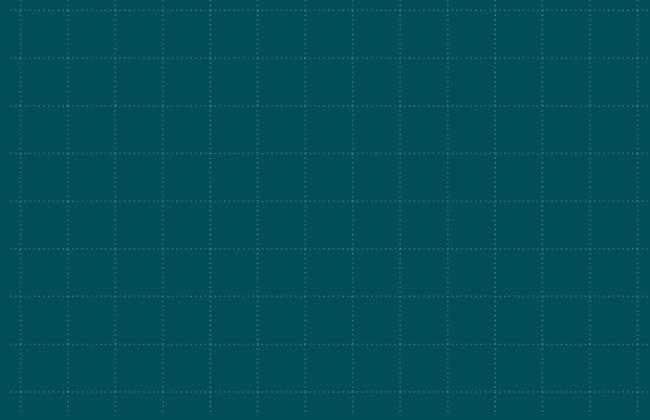
More effective public safety solutions

	% A Lot Safer	Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black	Hisp	AAPI	Swing	Safety	NYS	CD
Getting illegal guns off the streets	68	77	53	62	66	76	73	72	58	61	70	71
Increasing access to mental health care	65	74	59	54	62	73	79	69	59	56	61	61
Building trust between police and the community	58	54	59	65	57	56	74	67	56	54	57	58
Increasing job opportunities and paying people a living wage	58	73	44	43	54	75	74	53	50	60	52	60
Putting more police officers on the streets	56	37	64	79	57	51	60	51	56	41	57	60
Programs and services that prevent crime and break its cycle	55	63	43	48	53	65	59	56	50	53	54	54
Summer youth employment and other mentoring programs for young people	53	63	46	42	48	74	60	57	50	54	55	54

Fewer than half of voters see longer sentences or deportations as making communities safer, though these policies resonate with independents and Republicans

Less effective public safety solutions

Solution	% A Lot Safer	Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black	Latino	AAPI	Swing	Safety	NYS	CD
Closing loopholes in gun laws and requiring stronger gun background checks	52	73	45	26	51	59	52	59	54	60	50	55
Sending trained health professionals in response to 911 calls for mental health crises	51	70	39	30	48	68	52	58	47	55	48	61
Mandating longer sentences for people who commit crimes	49	33	48	73	48	47	57	50	47	38	49	51
Investing in police de-escalation training to reduce unnecessary use of force	45	66	28	23	42	60	45	52	38	54	43	52
Rapid housing programs for people who are homeless to help them get off the street	44	59	40	24	40	57	55	40	49	52	37	38
Increasing affordable housing	44	57	36	28	40	63	57	47	38	50	43	43
Deporting immigrants who are accused of crimes swiftly without due process	42	14	49	78	44	29	44	34	45	26	43	37



TAKEAWAY #3

Democrats running with a comprehensive vision perform better than “tough on crime” Democrats.

A Democratic focus on prevention is more effective against GOP crime attacks than “tough” rhetoric

Informed Gubernatorial Vote

Hochul—Prevention (split sample)

Kathy Hochul is relentlessly fighting for New Yorkers and our families-whether it’s standing up to Trump or tackling the state’s affordability crisis so all New Yorkers can get ahead. As Governor, Hochul is working to prevent crime before it happens, instead of just reacting afterwards, by making historic investments in mental health care, increasing access to drug addiction treatment, and passing landmark gun legislation to keep illegal guns off the street.

Hochul—Tough (split sample)

Kathy Hochul is relentlessly fighting for New Yorkers and our families-whether it’s standing up to Trump or tackling the state’s affordability crisis so all New Yorkers can get ahead. As Governor, Hochul is getting tough on crime by increasing funding for law enforcement, changing bail laws to keep dangerous criminals behind bars, combating retail theft and assault on retail workers, and passing landmark gun safety legislation to keep illegal guns off the street.

Stefanik

New York Congresswoman Elise Stefanik believes crime is out of control and that Democrats’ failed policies have created a crime crisis. She proudly Backs the Blue, will welcome the National Guard, abolish failed cashless bail laws that fuel devastating crime and embolden violent criminals to terrorize innocent victims, end New York’s sanctuary state status and illegal-first policies, and work with ICE to deport violent and illegal immigrants who commit crimes and endanger our communities.

■ Hochul ■ Undecided ■ Stefanik



The immigration test garnered mixed results by subgroup, but focusing on real safety solutions—rather than criticizing ICE—is more effective overall

Which do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right in your opinion?

[ATTACK] New York is being overrun by migrant crime and Democrats' open border policies are to blame. We cannot spend billions in taxpayer money to shelter illegal migrants – many of them criminals – and provide them free benefits while New Yorkers struggle to pay bills. It's time to deport dangerous migrants creating chaos and crime and restore peace of mind to law-abiding Americans.

[SPLIT: SOLUTION] The way to make New York safer is by investing in things that improve quality of life – good schools, well-paying jobs, affordable healthcare, and housing. Instead, politicians are too busy scapegoating immigrants for political points instead of fixing our broken system. Wasting taxpayer money on mass deportations targeting law-abiding residents and even citizens distracts from solutions that truly keep us safe.

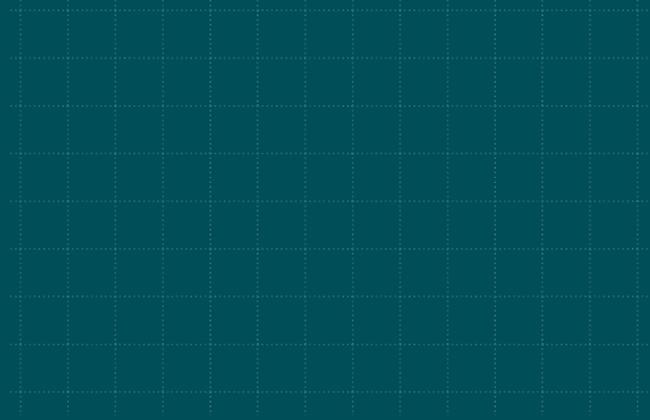
[SPLIT: CRITICISM] Wasting taxpayer money on targeting longtime residents in good standing and even citizens, creates chaos, divides communities, and distracts from solutions that make us safer. Only a fraction of ICE arrests involve someone with a criminal record. Tearing apart families and detaining children doesn't represent our values or make us any safer. It is cruel and doesn't increase safety.

ATTACK VS. SOLUTION



ATTACK VS. CRITICISM





TAKEAWAY #4

Democrats should go on the offense, not avoid the issue.

Framing National Guard deployment as ineffective and highlighting Trump's actions that have undermined community safety is a better tactic for Democrats than leaning into the chaos Trump is creating

Which do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right in your opinion?

[TOUGH] Crime is devastating New York because of Democrats' failed policies that coddle criminals and prioritize illegal immigrants over law-abiding Americans. Their reckless policies have left families feeling unsafe, hurt small businesses, and pushed people to flee our cities. We need the federal government to send the National Guard to restore law and order.

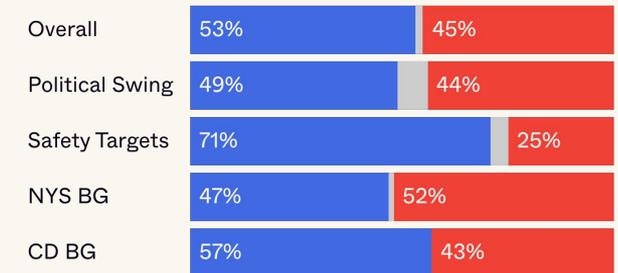
[SPLIT: OFFENSE] We all want safety, but deploying the National Guard is a political power grab, not a real solution. Trump is pretending to address crime to distract from his actions that threaten the safety of our communities, like cutting funding for community violence intervention programs, victim services, and drug and mental health treatment.

[SPLIT: CHAOS] Everyone deserves safe communities, but Trump is stoking chaos by sending ICE agents and the National Guard to conduct raids and terrorize our neighborhoods. This reckless overreach makes life less stable, takes law enforcement away from addressing violent crime, and violates our fundamental rights and freedoms instead of protecting our communities.

TOUGH VS. OFFENSE



TOUGH VS. CHAOS



Takeaways

1

There is potential political benefit for Hochul and New York Democrats who engage on the issue of safety.

There is significant overlap between “Safety and Justice targets”—voters primed to move into the Democratic column if reached with a compelling safety message—and political swing voters—people who self-identify as independent or are undecided in the gubernatorial race or self-identify as Democrat but are not planning to vote for Hochul in 2026. Overlap between these two groups indicates there is a key opportunity for Democrats who vocally communicate about safety to enhance the party’s brand while gaining electorally in 2026 and beyond.

2

While public safety remains a vulnerability for Democrats, voters prefer a comprehensive safety approach.

Despite a Democratic advantage in party self-identification, Republicans hold a slight edge on who’s trusted to improve safety, particularly among white non-college and middle-aged voters, with Democrats underperforming partisanship on the issue of improving safety in communities by 16 points. A majority of New Yorkers lean toward prevention-focused strategies—addressing guns, mental health, and community investment—though partisan and demographic gaps remain significant.

3

Democrats can also make gains by focusing on Trump’s safety record.

New Yorkers are opposed to Trump’s deployment of the National Guard and see it as a political power grab, not a real solution. But Democrats should go further and seize the opportunity to criticize Trump’s record cutting funding for community violence intervention programs, victim services, and drug and mental health treatment. While voters are more mixed on the federal government’s deployment of ICE to cities to conduct deportations, when addressing the topic, Democrats should pivot away from ICE and toward highlighting policies that make life more affordable and actually keep families safe.

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