The Role of the Crime Narrative in the ‘22 Elections.

INSIGHTS FROM SURVEY RESEARCH
CONDUCTED FOR VERA ACTION

December 16, 2022

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SECTIONS

03 Goals, objectives, methods

06 Key takeaways

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Research goals:

Step 1:
Analyze the impact of the crime narratives
in the 2022 elections (reported here)

Step 2:
Inform future electoral messaging on the topic

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Research questions:

1
What drove vote choice and what was the relative importance of crime?

2
What role does safety play in views toward crime?

3
Did exposure to ads about crime elevate the issue as a priority?

4
What effects did the ads have?

5
What conservative attacks were strongest?

6
Did it help for Democrats to engage?

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Methods:

- Survey of n = 2,100 midterm voters
- N = 300 each in: AZ, FL, GA, MI, NC, PA, WI
- Conducted November 11 - 22, 2022
- Using YouGov's online panel

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Takeaways.

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10
Key findings.

DATA SUGGEST:

1
Crime was not a driving issue among these swing state voters (including among Republicans).

2
Instead, a changing America (particularly on race), the economy, climate, and abortion were driving forces.

3
How safe someone feels in their own community has no correlation with vote choice, and very little impact on prioritizing crime as an issue priority. This suggests that talking about solutions in their own community may have little impact.

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Instead, these views are most correlated to prioritizing crime as an issue:

- Attitudes related to a changing America (e.g., immigration, racial resentment, woke agenda, socialism)
- Perceiving crime as a problem in big cities (which is also correlated with race – even more so than party ID)
- Worry that crime in urban areas will come to my community
- Worry we're moving toward a lawless society
- Saying the protests in the summer of 2020 made me less safe

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Among those who say crime is a big problem where they live:

- Economy is top voting issue (38% v. 16% crime)
- Abortion #2 (25%)
- Gun violence (22%) more than crime (16%)
- Gun violence (43%) and street crime (42%) are the largest concerns related to violence and public safety
- About a third say criminals going free (35%) / releasing criminals (37%) affected their vote

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Most respondents say they were exposed to ads about crime. WI and PA respondents are most likely to report seeing “a lot” of ads on crime.

A majority says they heard more from Republicans on crime (58%) than Democrats. 13% say they heard more from Democrats and 14% say they heard from both equally, (15% unsure).

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Here’s what we found when we explored the impact of exposure to crime ads generally (whether people saw ads on crime, and how many – “a lot,” “some,” “a few”).

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Impact of overall level of exposure to ads.

	Evidence of impact?	Details
Agenda setting	No	There is no correlation between the degree of ad exposure and prioritizing crime as an election issue (agenda setting / elevating the issue of crime in people's minds)
Vote preferences	No	There is no overall correlation with the degree of ad exposure and: • US House vote choice • Voting straight ticket • Intentions to vote straight ticket in future
Exposure to conservative attacks on crime	Yes	Seeing ads is correlated with hearing a lot about: • #1 Crime out of control in big cities • #2 Letting criminals go free • #3 Defunding police • #4 Cash bail

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Impact of overall level of exposure to ads.

	Evidence of impact?	Details
Democrats' brand on crime	Yes	Positive effects on Democrats' brand: • Wanting everyone to be safe • Wanting real solutions • Cares about preventing, not just responding to crime • Will work with Republicans to get things done No impact on negative brand attributes
Republicans' brand on crime	Yes	Positive effects on Republicans' brand: • Being tough on crime • Keeping criminals in jail • Law and order society • Tough on sentences / consequences • Fighting for victims' rights • Wants to solve root problems (Republicans only) Negative effects on Republicans' brand: • Passivity on Jan. 6 • Scare tactics • In the pockets of the gun lobby • Passivity on police brutality • Ignores systemic racism • Passive on hate crimes (Democrats) • Glorifies gun culture (Democrats)

Here are insights by party ID.

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Impact of overall level of exposure to ads.

	Independents / soft Republicans	Republicans	Democrats
Agenda setting	No correlation	Correlated with prioritizing crime as issue	No correlation
Actual vote choice and preferences	No correlation	No correlation	No correlation
Conservative attacks affected vote	• Crime out of control in cities • Releasing criminals • Cash bail • Stricter sentences	• Crime out of control in cities • Releasing criminals • Letting criminals go free • Cash bail • Stricter sentences • (No correlation with police funding)	• Letting criminals going free • Cash bail

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Impact of overall level of exposure to ads.

	Independents / soft Republicans	Republicans	Democrats
Democratic brand	Positive effects: • Wants everyone to be safe • Wants real solutions • Cares about preventing, not just responding No evidence of brand damage	Positive effects: • Wants everyone to be safe No evidence of brand damage	Positive effects: • Wants real solutions • Will work with Republicans to get things done No evidence of brand damage
Republican brand	Reinforced: • Being tough on crime • Keeping criminals in jail • Law and order society • Tough on sentences / consequences • Fighting for victims' rights Brand damage: • Passivity on Jan. 6 • Scare tactics • In the pockets of the gun lobby • Passivity on police brutality	Reinforced: • Being tough on crime • Wants to solve root causes • Tough on sentences Brand damage: • Passivity on gun violence / shootings • Passivity on Jan. 6 • Ignores systemic racism	Reinforced: • Keeping criminals in jail Brand damage: • Passivity on police brutality • Passivity on hate crimes / racist attacks • Glorifies gun culture • Ignores systemic racism

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While crime was not a driving force in vote choice, analysis suggests that conservative attacks on crime did have some impact on voters.

Conservative attacks broke through to a majority of respondents, especially “crime being out of control in cities.”

Half of respondents (49%) say at least one of the attacks we measured in the survey affected their vote. These responses were correlated with vote choice in the elections (though less so than other factors such as racial ideology, abortion, climate, and socialism).

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The top three most damaging attacks may be:

- Crime is out of control in big cities
- Letting criminals go free / releasing criminals
- Defunding police

Then:

- Getting rid of cash bail

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Analysis also suggests that Democrats' messaging / ads on crime had a significant positive impact on voters – particularly on increasing favorable perceptions toward Democrats' brand on crime.

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Detailed findings.

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What voters say influenced their vote.

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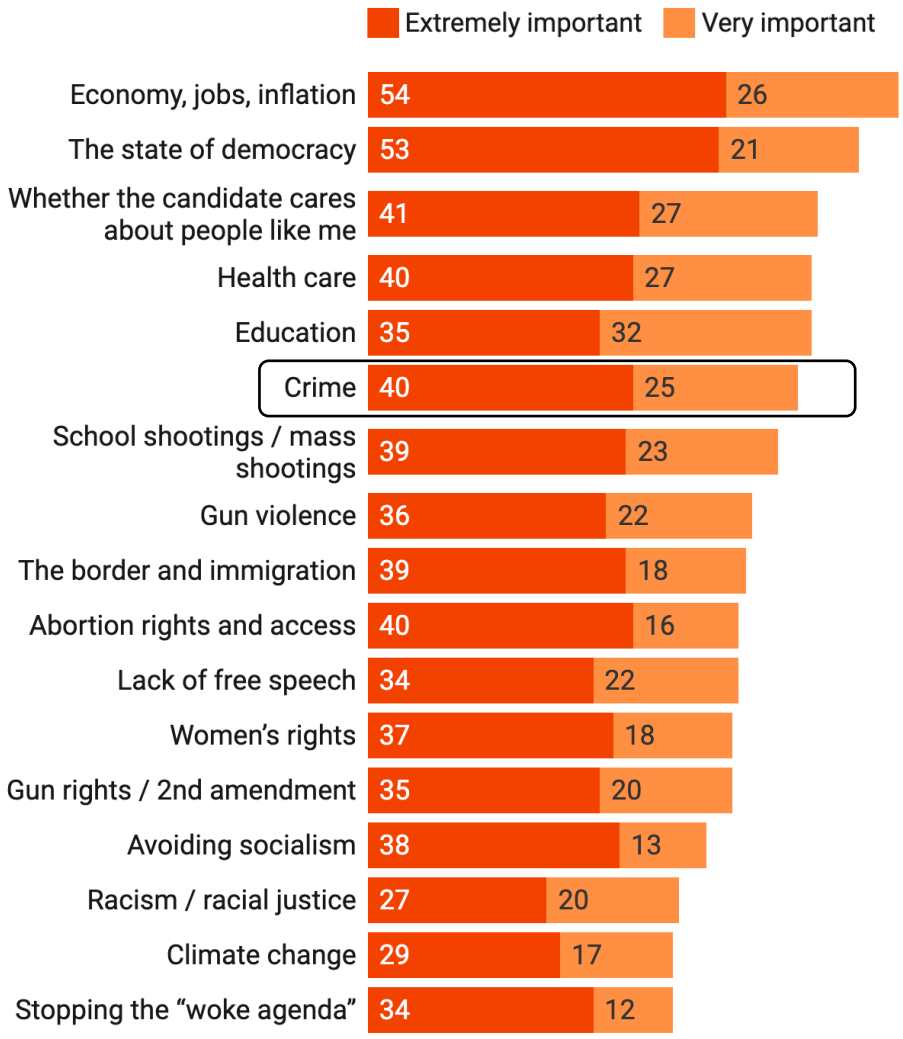
Two-thirds say that crime was an extremely or very important issue in their vote.

For you personally, how important were each of these issues in your vote for candidates this fall?



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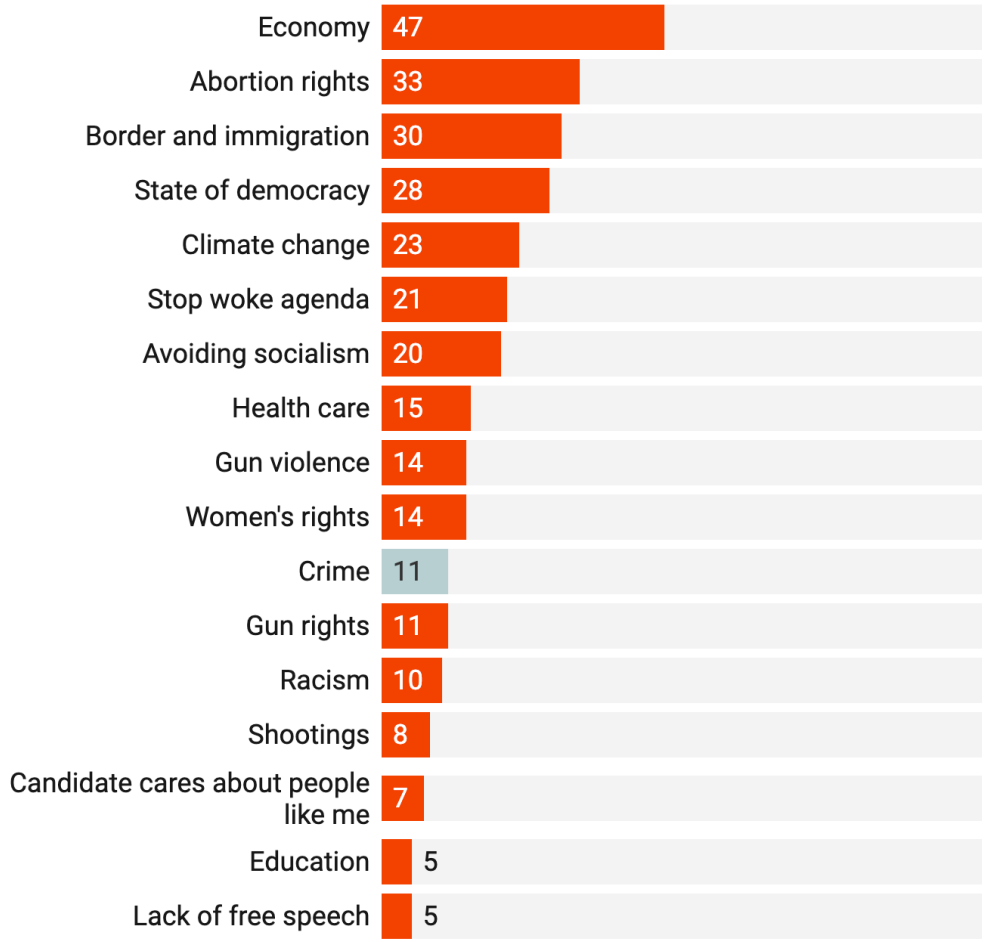
However, crime falls near the bottom when respondents tell us what issue was most important to their vote.

If you had to choose one or two, which was most important in your vote? Choose 1 or 2.



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There is no demographic group in which crime is the top issue.

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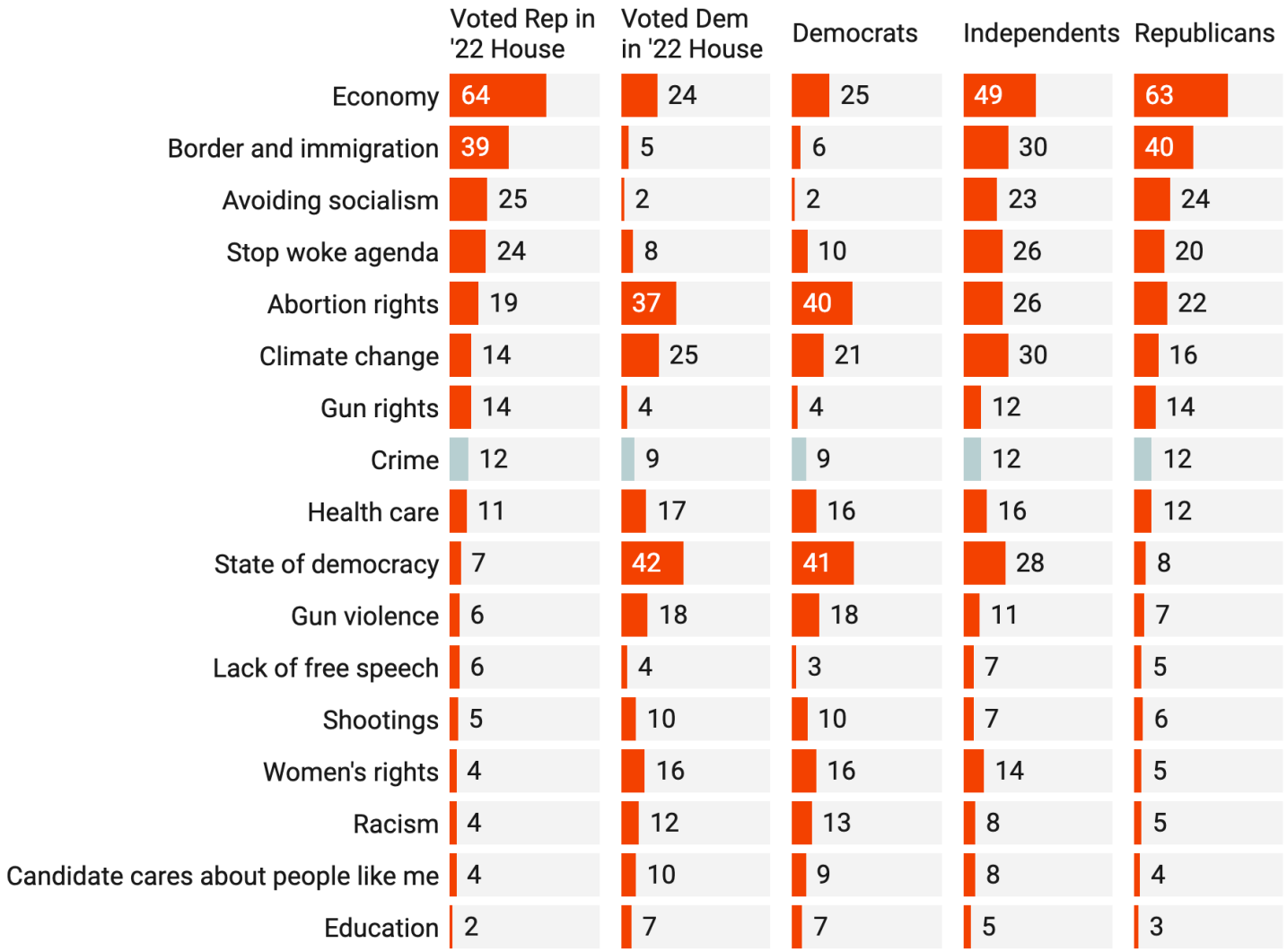
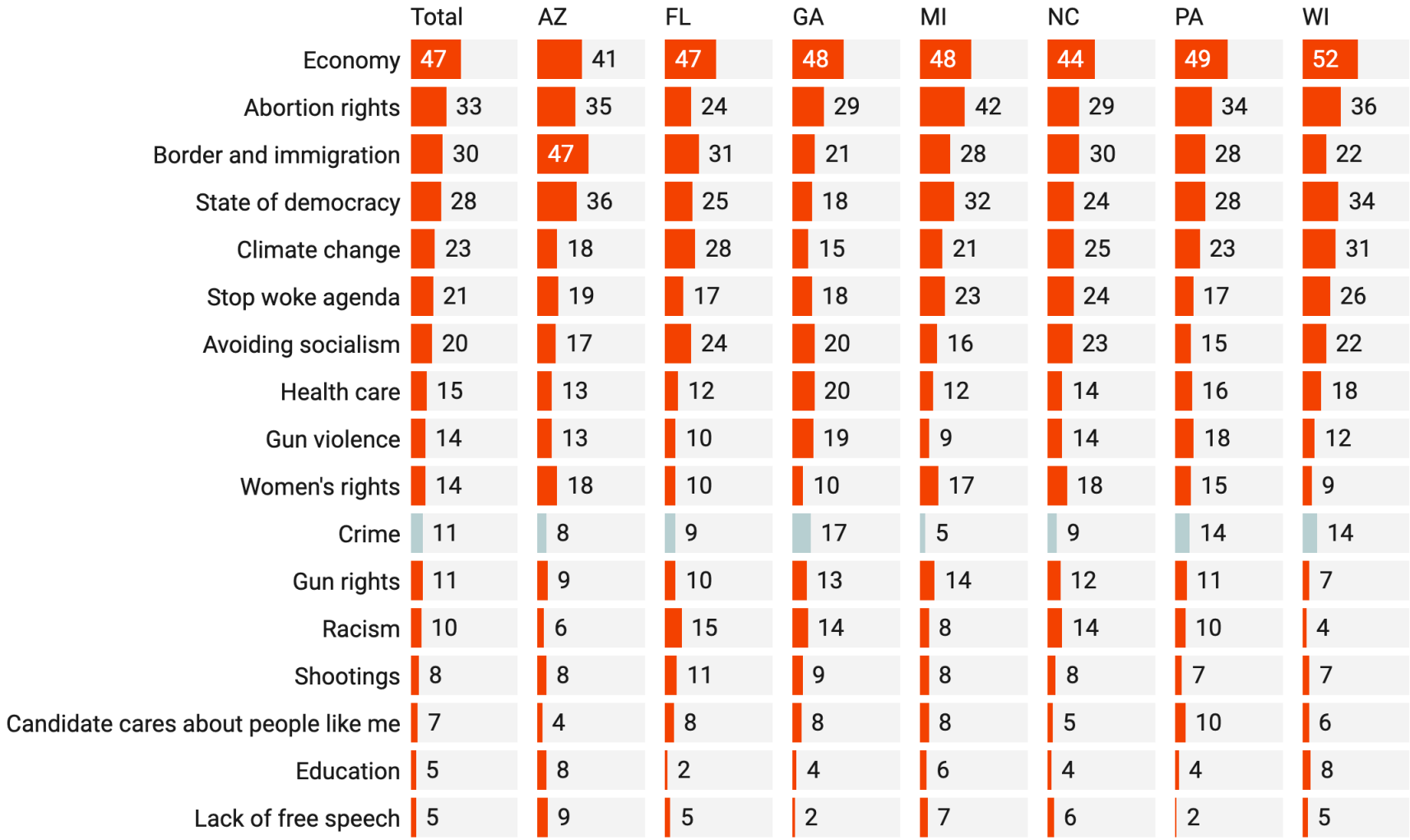
Even for Republicans, crime is in a third or fourth tier.

If you had to choose one or two, which was most important in your vote? Choose 1 or 2.



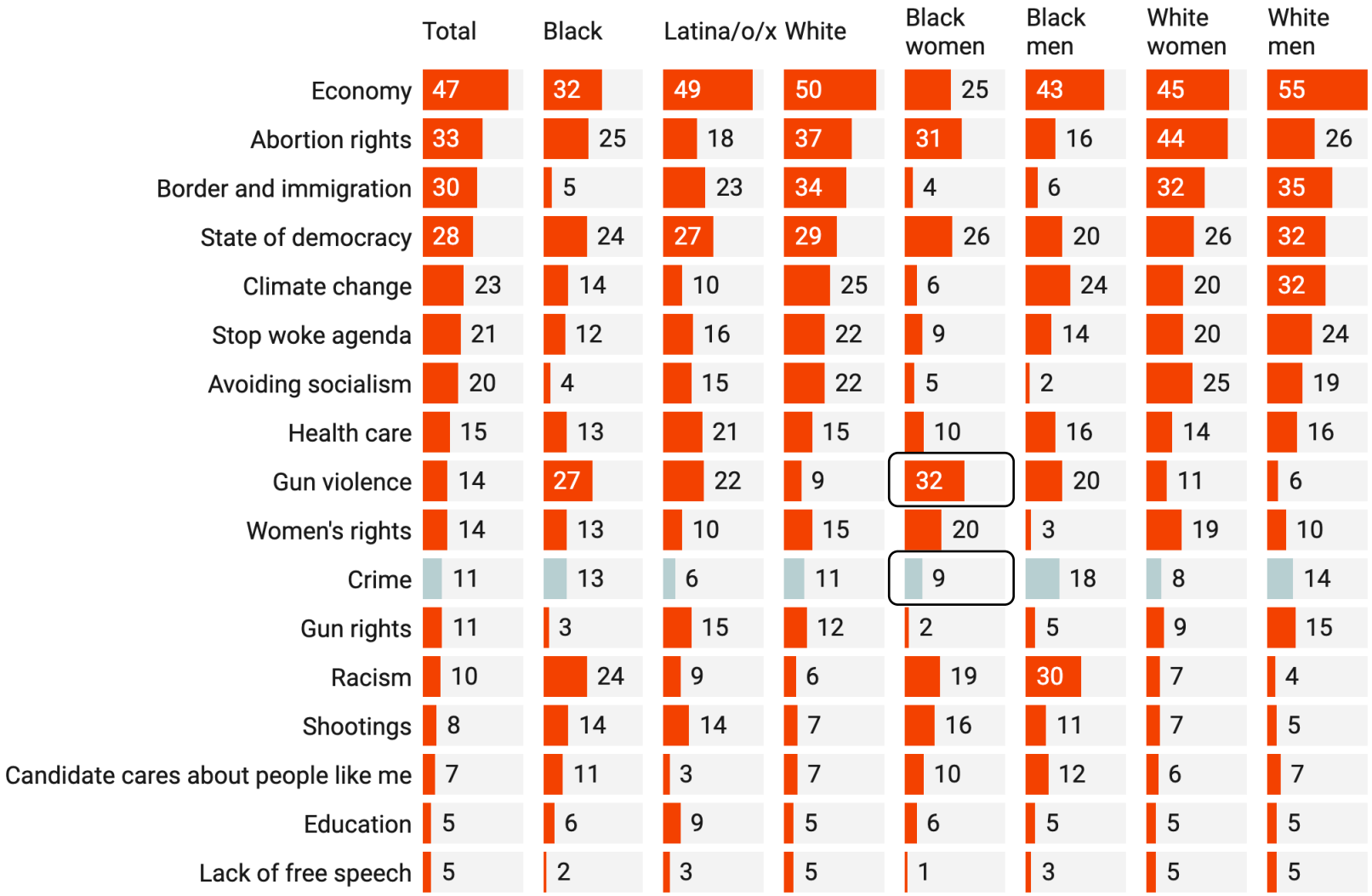
It's in the middle or lower tier across states.

If you had to choose one or two, which was most important in your vote? Choose 1 or 2.



Among Black women respondents, gun violence is much more likely to be a top issue than “crime.” Gun violence is a top issue along side abortion rights.

If you had to choose one or two, which was most important in your vote? Choose 1 or 2.



What analysis tells us about vote choice.

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Aside from self-report, what can analysis tell us about what best predicts vote choice?

We examined which variables in the survey are most predictive of how respondents voted in the ‘22 US House races (Democratic or Republican).

Some key insights:

- Several of the top predictors relate to race / racial ideology
- Crime generally as a voting issue has less predictive power than many other issues
- There is little to no correlation between how someone voted and their experience with safety and crime in one’s own life
- These variables are moderately correlated with voting Republican:
    + Saying letting “criminals going free” affected my vote
    + Agreeing we’re heading to a lawless society
    + Saying funding for police affected my vote
    + Perceiving crime as a big problem in big cities
- These variables are moderately correlated with voting Democratic:
    + Saying gun violence is a top crime-related concern
    + Saying gun violence is an important voting issue

See next few pages for details.

Among all respondents		US House vote choice
Top predictors	Party ID (7-pt scale)	0.85
	Agree/disagree: I support the Black Lives Matter movement	0.80
	Climate change as a voting issue	0.70
	Avoiding socialism as a voting issue	0.65
	Stopping the "woke agenda" as a voting issue	0.64
	Racial resentment (Discrimination against whites is as big of a problem...)	0.63
	Women's rights as a voting issue	0.63
	Abortion rights and access as a voting issue	0.60
	Racism / racial justice as a voting issue	0.60
	The border and immigration as a voting issue	0.59
Middle tier	Agree/disagree: The protests in the summer of 2020 made me feel unsafe	0.49
	Agree/disagree: I'm worried that we're moving toward a lawless society	0.49
	Criminals going free affected my 2022 vote	0.47
	Releasing criminals affected my 2022 vote	0.46
	Economy as a voting issue	0.45
	Gun violence among top concerns re: crime, violence, and public safety	0.44
	Economy, jobs, inflation as the #1 voting issue	0.43
	Police funding affected 2022 vote	0.43
	How big of a problem crime is in big cities	0.41
	Gun violence as a voting issue	0.40
	Crime as a voting issue	0.39
Not correlated	Perceived safety in daily life	0.10
	How big of a problem is crime where you live	0.03

This table shows the correlation coefficients between each variable and vote choice for House '22 vote. Coefficients range from 0 to 1, with 1 represent a perfect correlation.

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Among independents		House vote choice
Top predictors	Agree/disagree: I support the Black Lives Matter movement	0.79
	Party ID (7-pt scale)	0.73
	Climate change as a voting issue	0.72
	Stopping the "woke agenda" as a voting issue	0.71
	Avoiding socialism as a voting issue	0.70
	Racial resentment (Discrimination against whites is as big of a problem...)	0.66
	Abortion rights and access as a voting issue	0.65
	Women's rights as a voting issue	0.61
	The border and immigration as a voting issue	0.60
	Racism / racial justice as a voting issue	0.59
	Agree/disagree: The protests in the summer of 2020 made me feel unsafe	0.58
Middle tier	Agree/disagree: I'm worried that we're moving toward a lawless society	0.53
	Releasing murderers / sex offenders / repeat offenders influenced my vote	0.51
	Letting criminals going free influenced my vote	0.49
	Economy, jobs, inflation as a voting issue	0.48
	Health care as a voting issue	0.46
	How big of a problem is crime in big cities	0.45
	Agree/disagree: I'm worried crime in urban areas will come to my community	0.45
	Gun rights / 2nd amendment as a voting issue	0.44
	Crime as a voting issue	0.44
Not correlated	Perceived safety in daily life	0.12
	How big of a problem is crime where you live	0.00

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These variables best predict prioritizing crime as an important voting issue.

Top predictors	Importance of crime as a voting issue
The border and immigration as a voting issue	0.61
Avoiding socialism as a voting issue	0.61
Economy, jobs, inflation as a voting issue	0.61
How big of a problem is crime in the United States	0.58
Gun rights / 2nd amendment as a voting issue	0.57
Stopping the "woke agenda" as a voting issue	0.55
How big of a problem is crime in big cities	0.54
Lack of free speech as a voting issue	0.52
Agree/disagree: I'm worried that crime in urban areas will come to my community	0.51
Agree/disagree: I'm worried that we're moving toward a lawless society	0.50
Racial resentment (Discrimination against whites is as big of a problem...)	0.47
Agree/disagree: The protests in the summer of 2020 made me feel unsafe	0.45
Less predictive	
How big of a problem is crime where you live	0.32
Perceived safety in daily life	0.19

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These variables best predict prioritizing crime as an important voting issue.

Among Black voters	Importance of crime as a voting issue
How big of a problem is crime in the United States	0.56
Economy, jobs, inflation as a voting issue	0.53
How big of a problem is crime in big cities	0.43
Agree/disagree: I'm worried that crime in urban areas will come to my community	0.41
Lack of free speech as a voting issue	0.41
Gun rights / 2nd amendment as a voting issue	0.40
The border and immigration as a voting issue	0.40
Avoiding socialism as a voting issue	0.38
School shootings / mass shootings as a voting issue	0.38
Gun violence as a voting issue	0.37
Health care as a voting issue	0.36
Stopping the "woke agenda" as a voting issue	0.33
Less predictive	
How big of a problem is crime where you live	0.28
Perceived safety in daily life	0.14

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Why wasn’t crime a higher priority?

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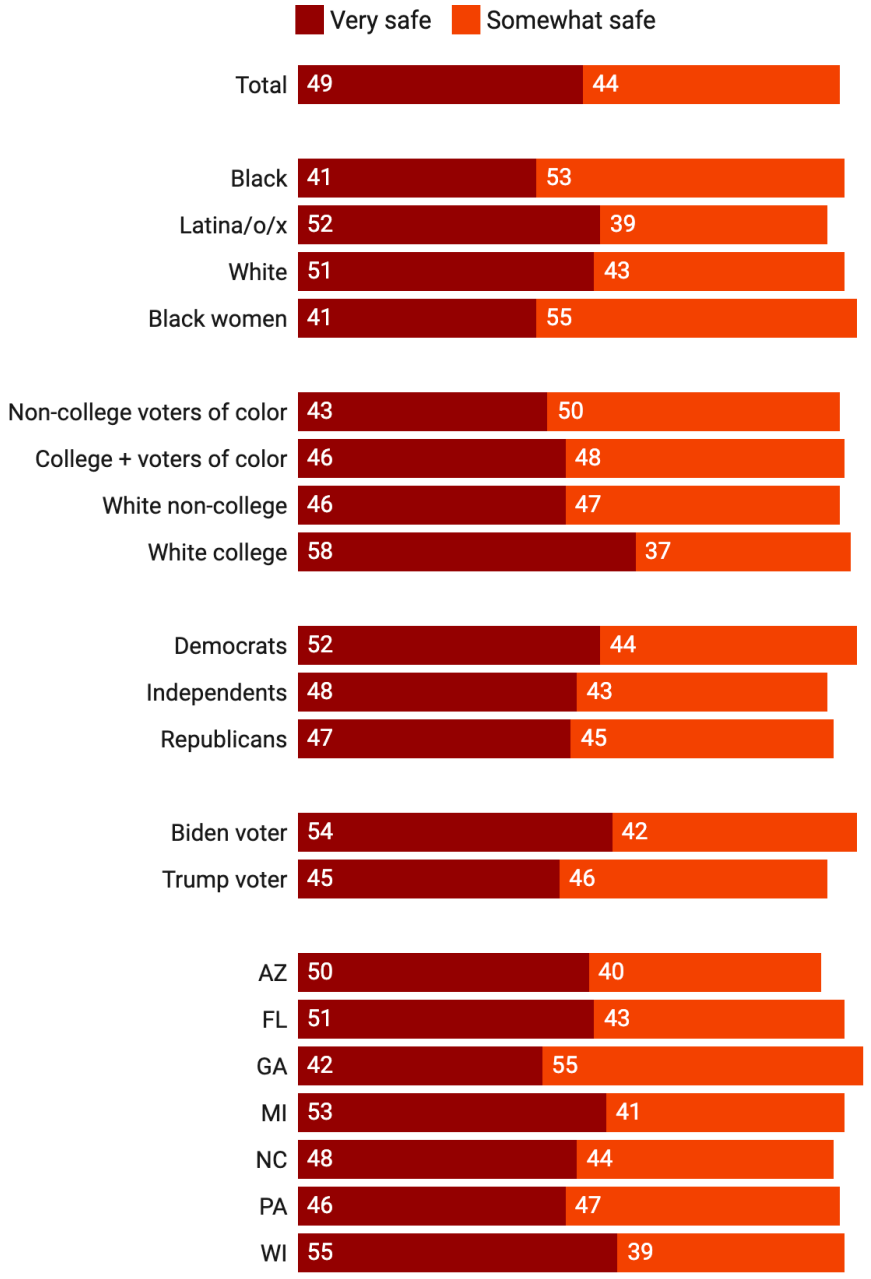
Think about your own neighborhood and community.
How safe do you feel in your day-to-day life?



One reason: 93% of respondents say they feel safe in their daily life.

In other words, crime may not be the most pressing issue affecting their personal lives.

There aren't huge differences across segments, but Black voters and Trump voters are less likely than their counterparts to feel "very safe."

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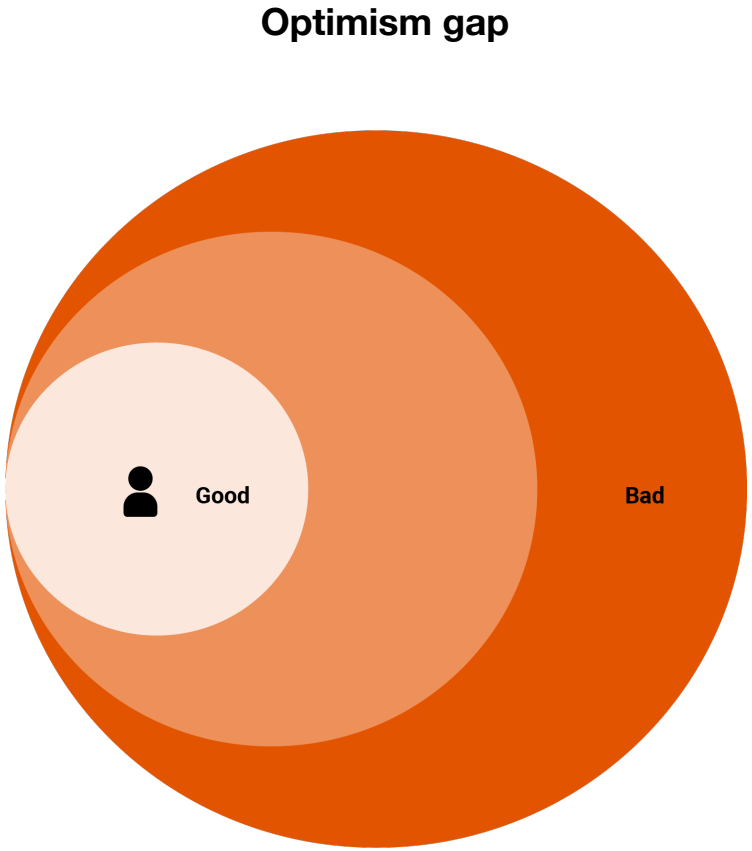
Second reason: Most don’t see crime as a big problem where they live.



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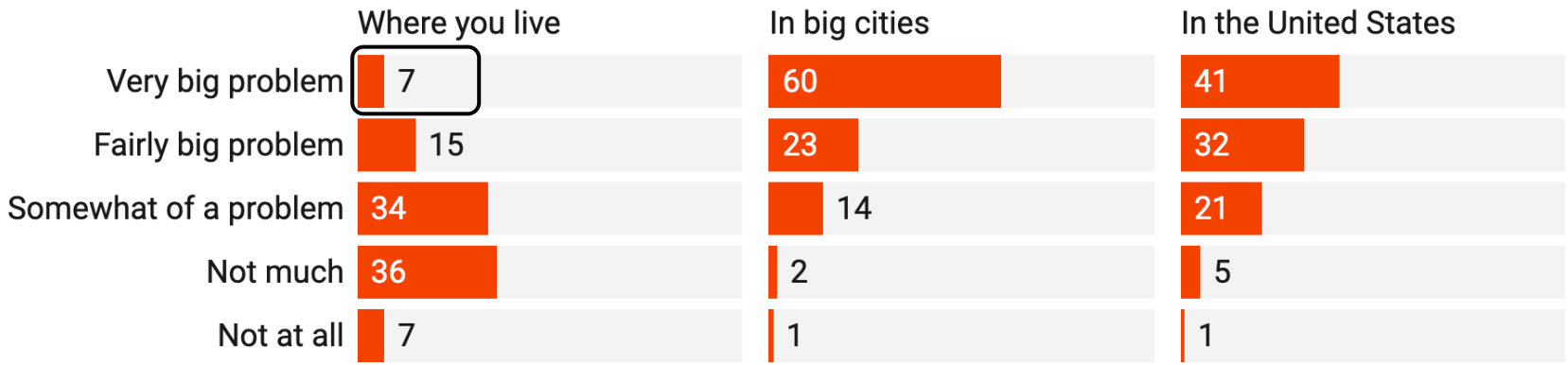
Just 7% say crime is “a very big problem” where they live.

How big of a problem do you think crime is…

RANDOMIZE



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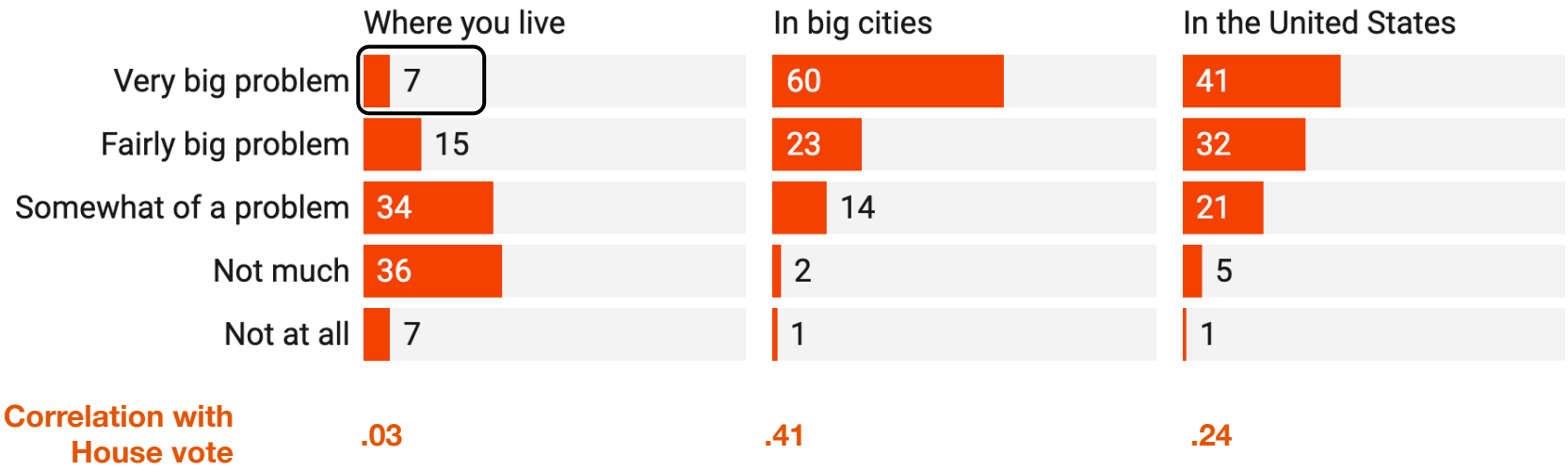
Thinking crime is a very big problem in big cities is most correlated with vote.

How big of a problem do you think crime is…

RANDOMIZE



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Among white voters, views toward race and a changing America are most correlated with perceiving crime as a problem in big cities.

Note that other PerryUndem data show that views toward the border and immigration and a “woke agenda” are strongly associated with views toward race and racial resentment.

Top predictors among white voters	Crime is a big problem in big cities
The border and immigration as a voting issue	0.53
Avoiding socialism as a voting issue	0.52
Agree/disagree: I'm worried that we're moving toward a lawless society	0.51
Agree/disagree: I support the Black Lives Matter movement	0.51
Racial resentment: Today, discrimination against whites has become as big of a problem as discrimination against Blacks, Latinos, and other racial/ethnic minorities	0.50
Stopping the "woke agenda” as a voting issue	0.49
Economy, jobs, inflation as a voting issue	0.48
Agree/disagree: I'm worried that crime in urban areas will come to my community	0.47
Agree/disagree: The protests in the summer of 2020 made me feel unsafe	0.47
Party ID	0.42

% Saying crime is
a “very big problem” in big cities

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Among black voters, perceptions are linked with other structural concerns.

Top predictors among Black voters	Crime is a big problem in big cities
Economy, jobs, inflation as a voting issue	0.40
The border and immigration as a voting issue	0.32
Avoiding socialism as a voting issue	0.28
Gun violence as a voting issue	0.27
Gun rights / second amendment as a voting issue	0.24
Lack of free speech as a voting issue	0.23
Education as a voting issue	0.23
Agree/disagree: I'm worried that we're moving toward a lawless society	0.22
Gender	0.20
Age	0.19
Health care as voting issue	0.19

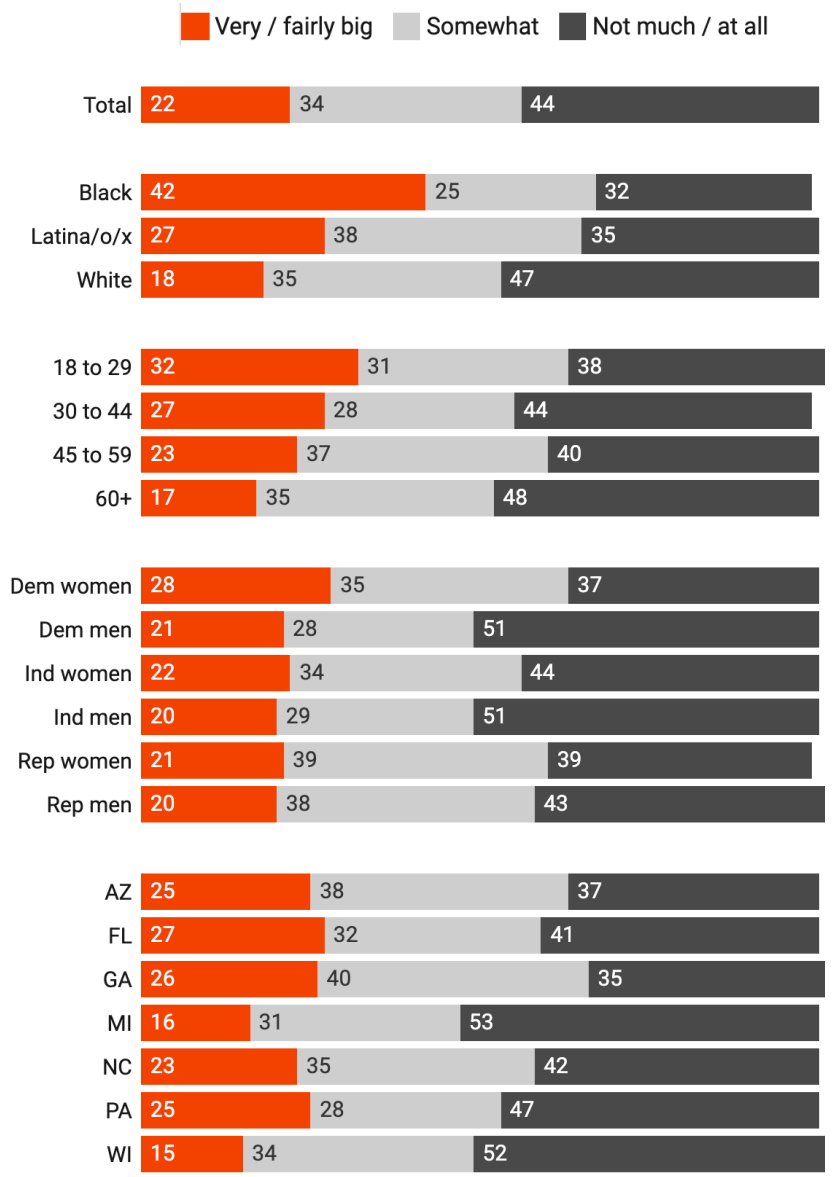
Black respondents are most likely to say crime is a big problem where they live.

Black women respondents are slightly more likely than Black men to say crime is a big or fairly big problem (46% v. 38%) where they live.

Young people are more likely than older people to say crime is a problem where they live.

White voters, WI voters, and MI voters are among the least likely to say crime is a problem where they live.

How big of a problem do you think crime is where you live?



What did they see / hear during the campaigns?

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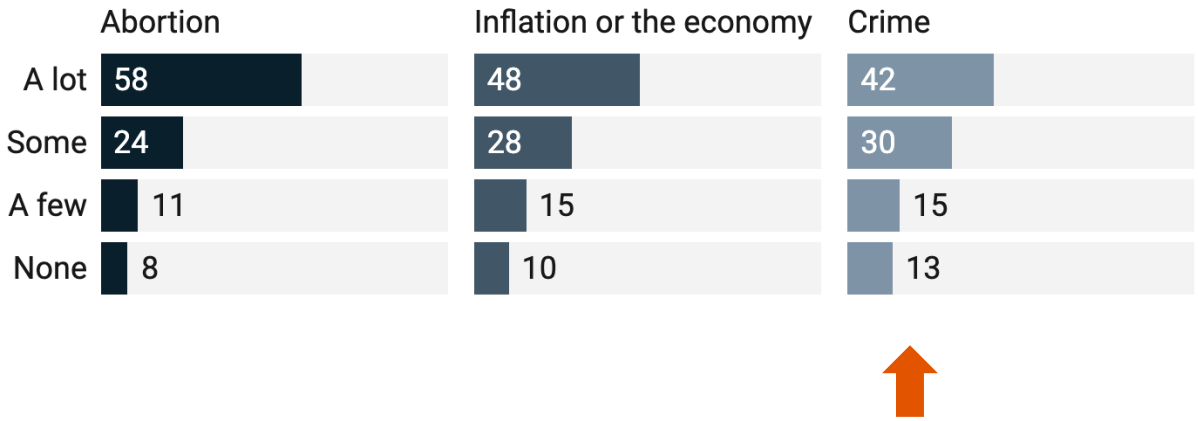
Most say they were exposed to ads about crime.

In the past month or two, how many political ads have you seen about…
RANDOMIZE



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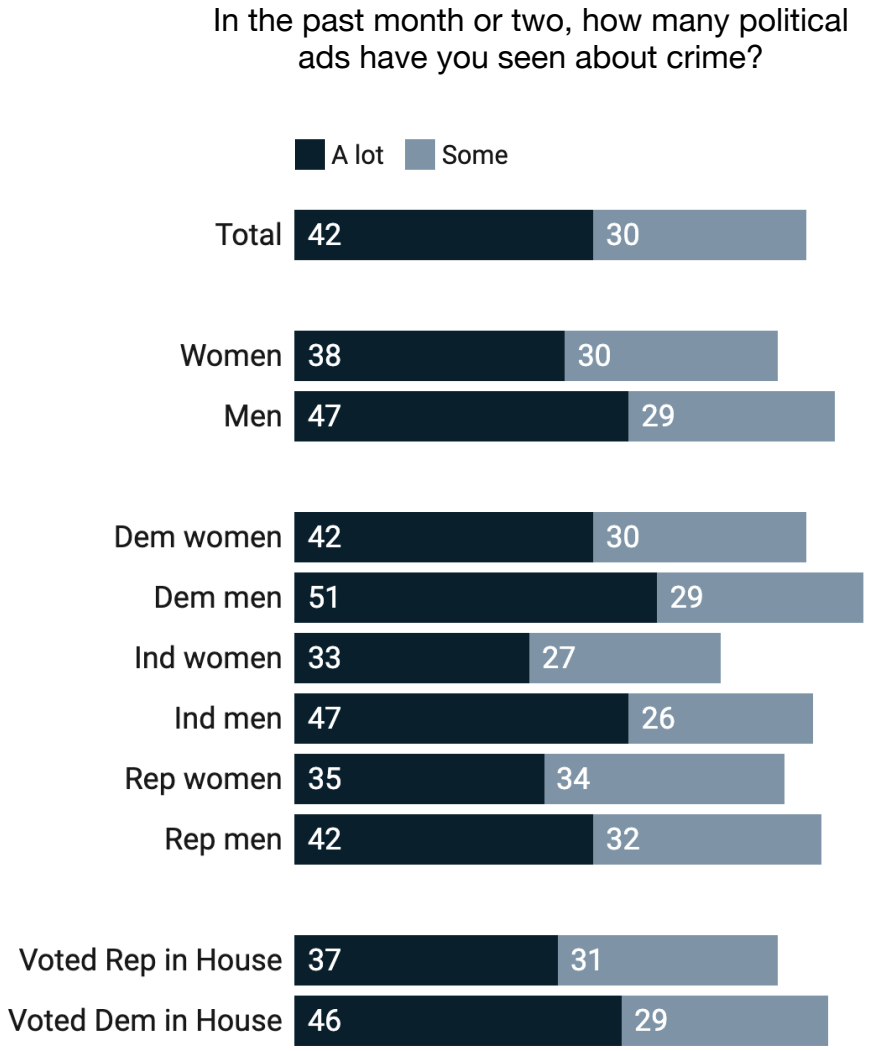
Men, especially Democratic men, are most likely to report seeing a lot of ads.

Democrats and those who voted Democratic in the House race are more likely to have seen “a lot” of crime ads than those who voted Republican (46% v. 37%).



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WI and PA respondents report seeing the most ads.

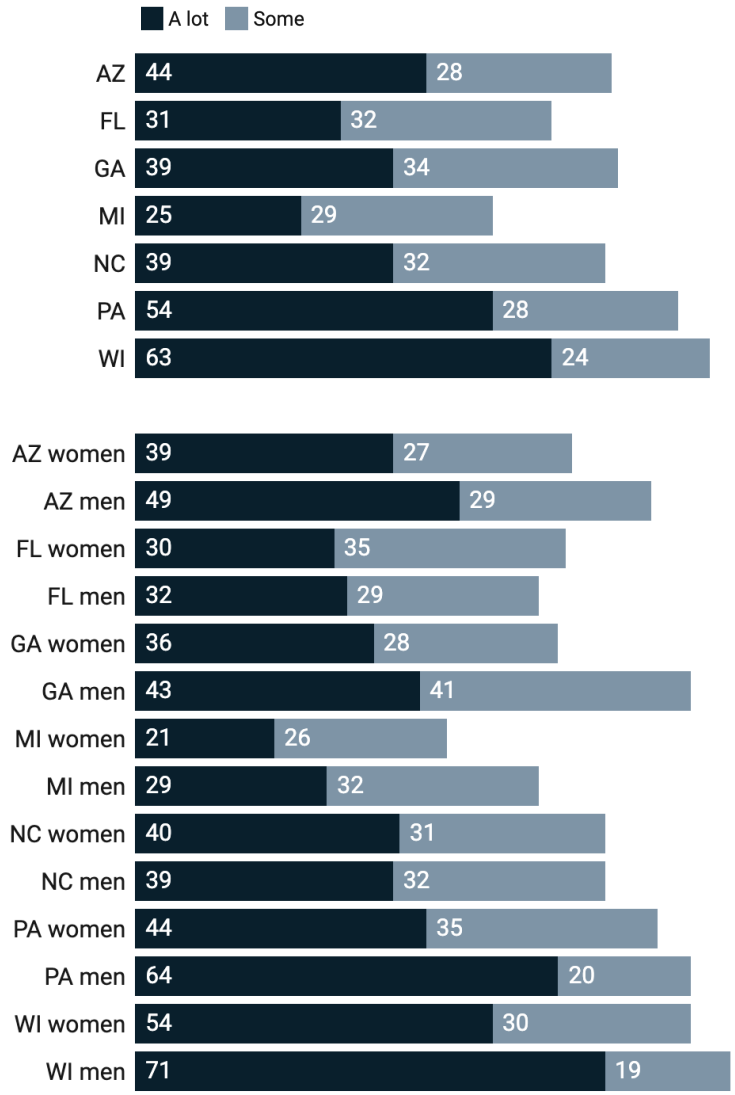
Michigan and Florida respondents report seeing the least ads about crime.

Men are more likely than women in these states to report seeing a lot of ads:

- AZ
- GA
- MI
- PA
- WI

There's no gender gap among NC or FL respondents.

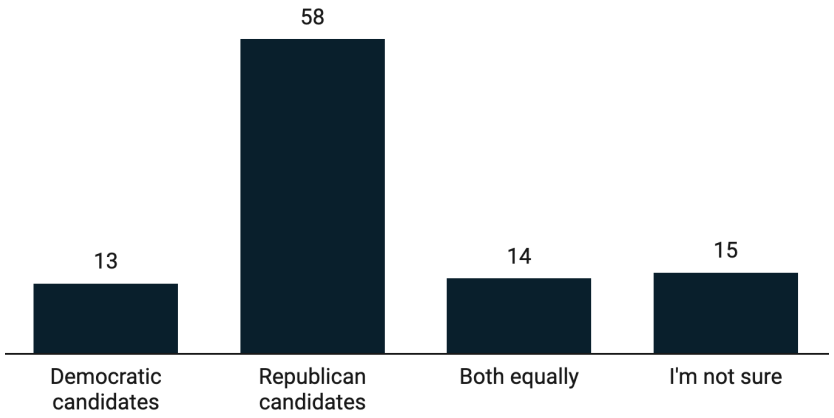
In the past month or two, how many political ads have you seen about crime?



Respondents heard more from Republicans than Democrats on crime.

The one exception is Black voters in the sample – 38% say they heard more from Democrats v. 22% saying Republicans. 21% say both equally and 19% are unsure.

In the campaigns this year, who did you hear from more on the issue of crime?
ROTATE FIRST TWO



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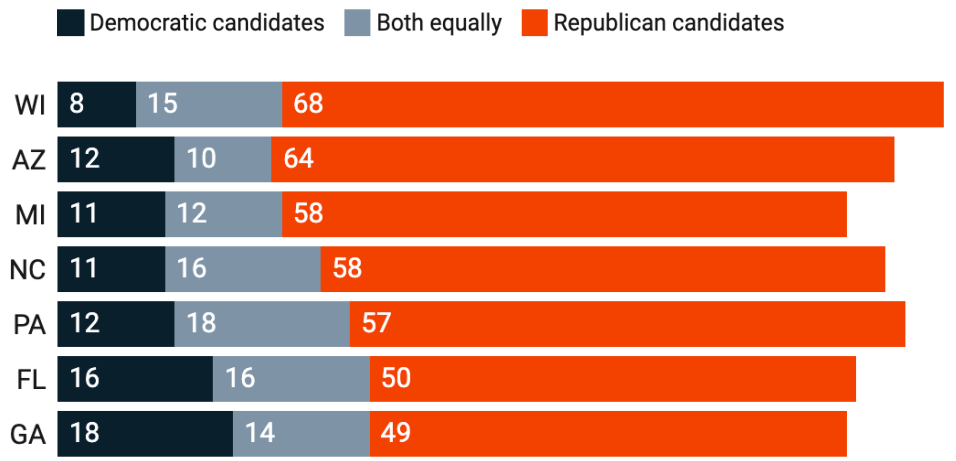
WI, AZ, and MI respondents were less likely than others to say they heard from Democrats.

In the campaigns this year, who did you hear from more on the issue of crime?
ROTATE FIRST TWO



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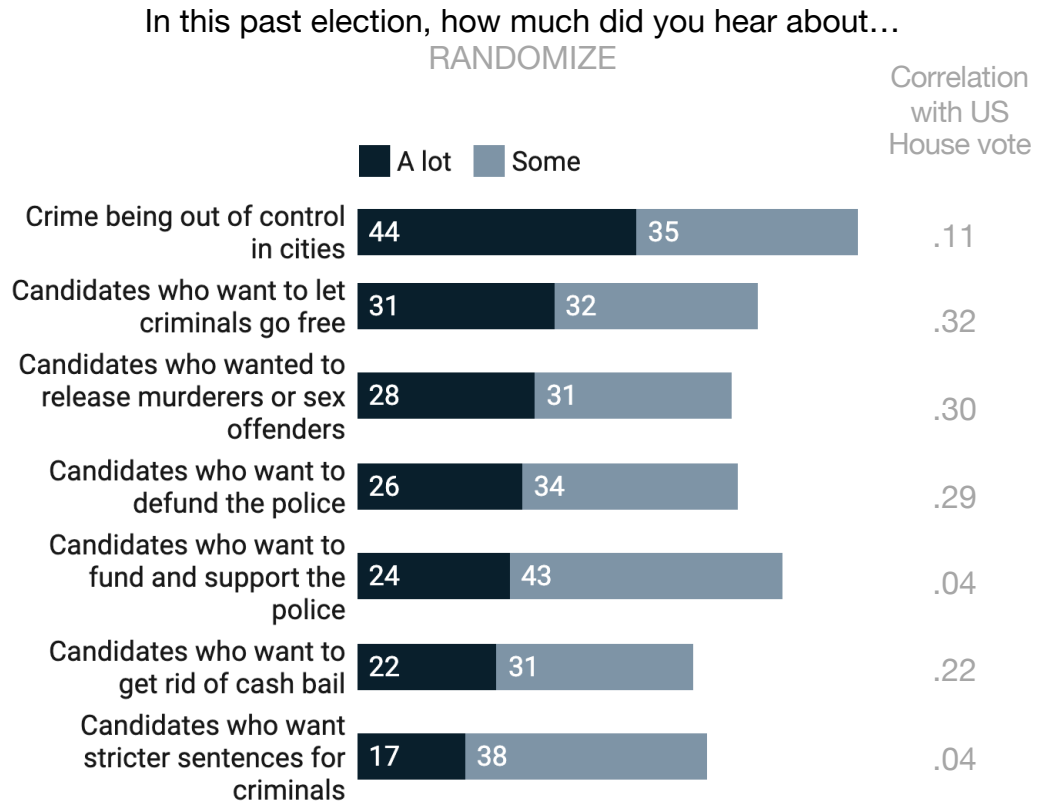
Most were exposed to conservative attacks.

See by state on the next page.



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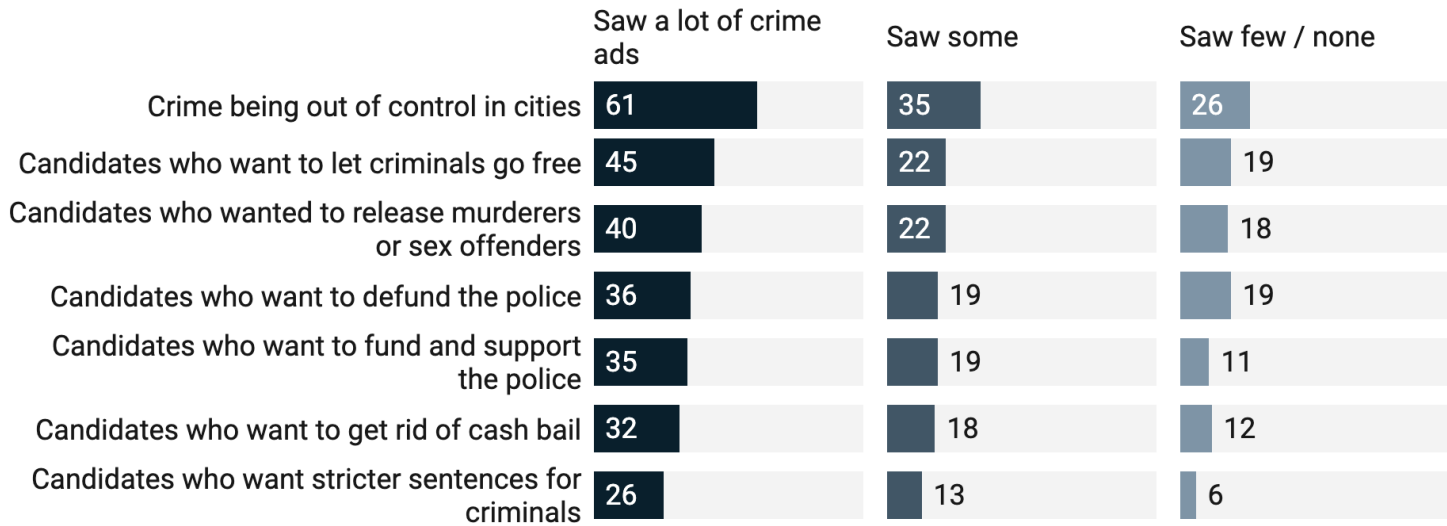
Attacks penetrated through ads.

WI, PA, and NC respondents are most likely to report hearing a lot of attacks about releasing criminals. See next page.

In this past election, how much did you hear about…

% Heard “a lot”



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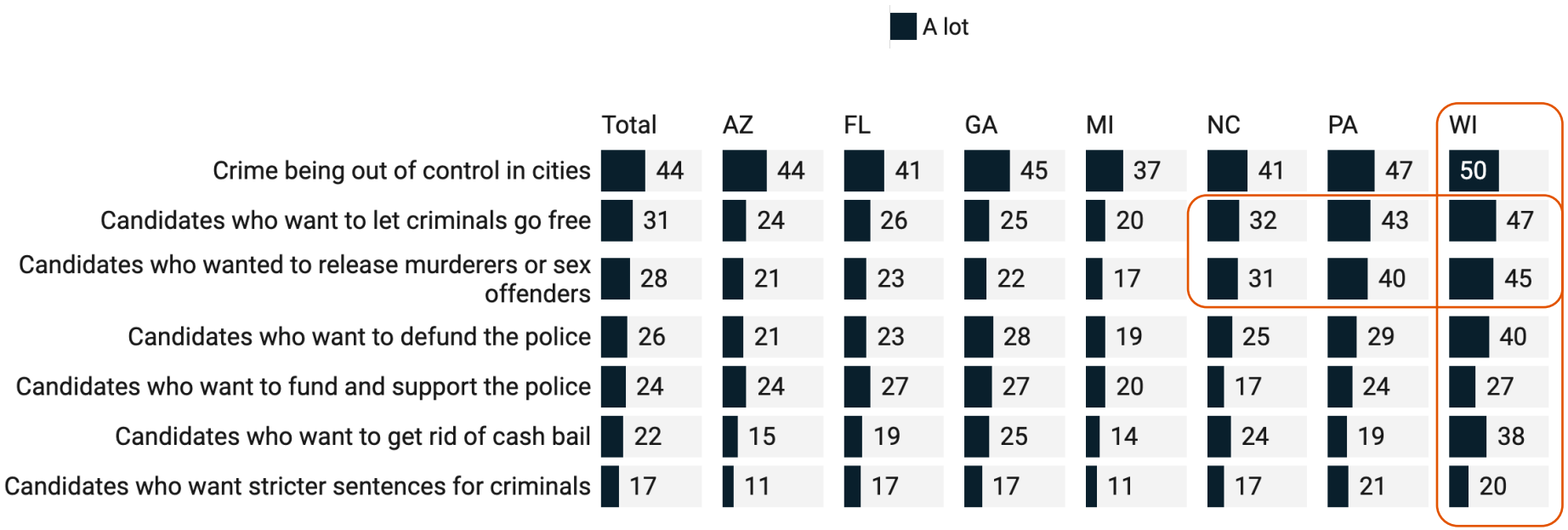
In this past election, how much did you hear about…

RANDOMIZE



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Exploring the impact of ad exposure and attacks.

What do data tell us about the impact of ads and conservative attacks?

1

Exposure to crime ads alone did not elevate the issue as a priority (agenda setting)

2

Overall exposure to crime ads is not correlated with vote choice

3

The ads did communicate specific attacks, that influenced some people's vote, particularly:

- Letting criminals go free / Releasing sex offenders / murderers / etc.
- Defunding police

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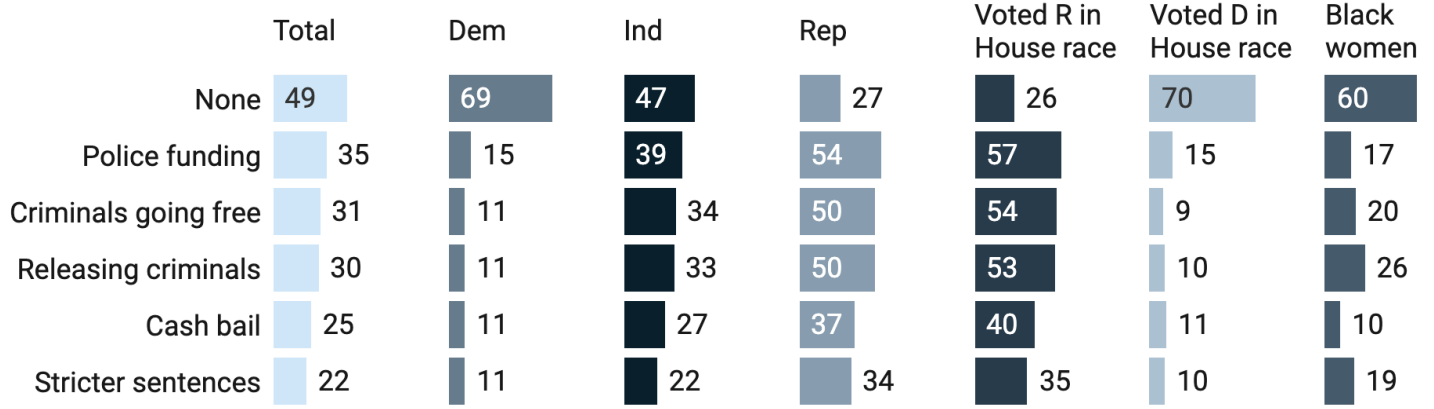
Did any of these issues affect who you voted for in the elections? Select any that apply.

RANDOMIZE UP TO NONE



Correlation with House vote choice

	Total	Independents
None	.43	.46
Police funding	.43	.44
Criminals going free	.47	.50
Releasing criminals	.46	.52
Cash bail	.33	.33
Stricter sentences	.30	.33
Perceiving crime in big cities as a problem:	.41	.47

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Effects of ad exposure.

Among independents and soft Republicans

NO CORRELATION

- House vote
- Straight ticket voting
- Intention to vote straight ticket in future
- Prioritizing crime as an issue in 2022

CORRELATION

- Hearing a lot about crime being out of control in big cities (63% who saw a lot of ads v. 30% who saw none)
- Saying these attacks affected their vote:
    - Releasing criminals (44% who saw a lot of ads v. 29% saw none)
    - Cash bail (37% v. 20%)
    - Stricter sentences (34% v. 18%)
    - (There's less correlation with police funding and criminals going free)
- Reinforced Republican brand attributes, especially:
    - Being tough on crime (62% v. 47%)
    - Keeping criminals in jail (66% v. 54%)
    - Law and order society (64% v. 48%)
    - Tough on sentences / consequences (57% v. 41%)
    - Fighting for victims' rights (46% v. 34%)
- But, may have damaged Republicans slightly on these attributes:
    - Passivity on Jan. 6 (23% v. 9%)
    - Scare tactics (21% v. 9%)
    - In the pockets of the gun lobby (21% v. 8%)
    - Passivity on police brutality (18% v. 6%)

Effects of ad exposure (cont.)

Among independents and soft Republicans

CORRELATION

- We don’t see evidence of harm on Democrats’ brand

- If anything, there’s a correlation between viewing a lot of ads and positive attributes of Democrats on:
    - Wanting everyone to be safe (21% v. 5%)
    - Wanting real solutions (13% v. 2%)
    - Cares about preventing crime, not just responding (13% v. 2%)

PERRY UNDEM

The following pages walk you through the data among independents and soft Republicans.

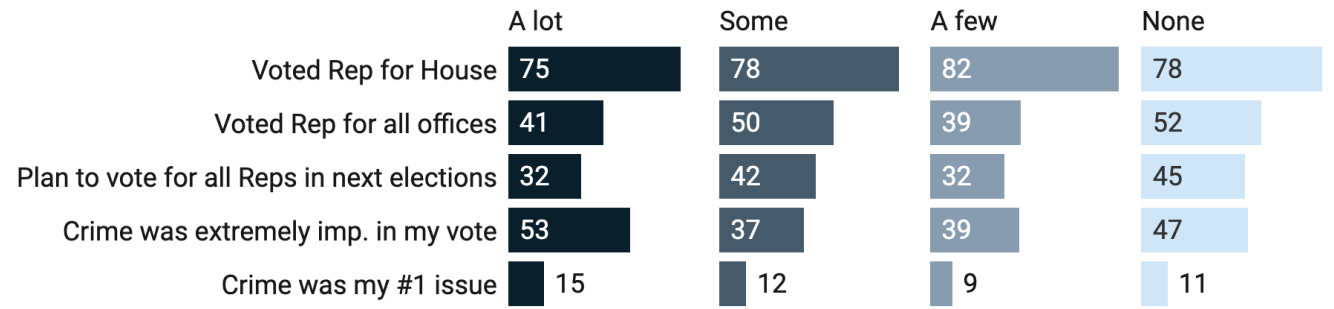
PERRY UNDEM

These is no correlation between reported exposure to ads and:

- House vote choice
- Straight ticket R votes
- Intentions to vote straight ticket R
- Prioritizing crime as an issue in 2022

In the past month or two, how many political ads have you seen about crime?

Base n = 622 independents who don't lean Democratic and not so strong Republicans



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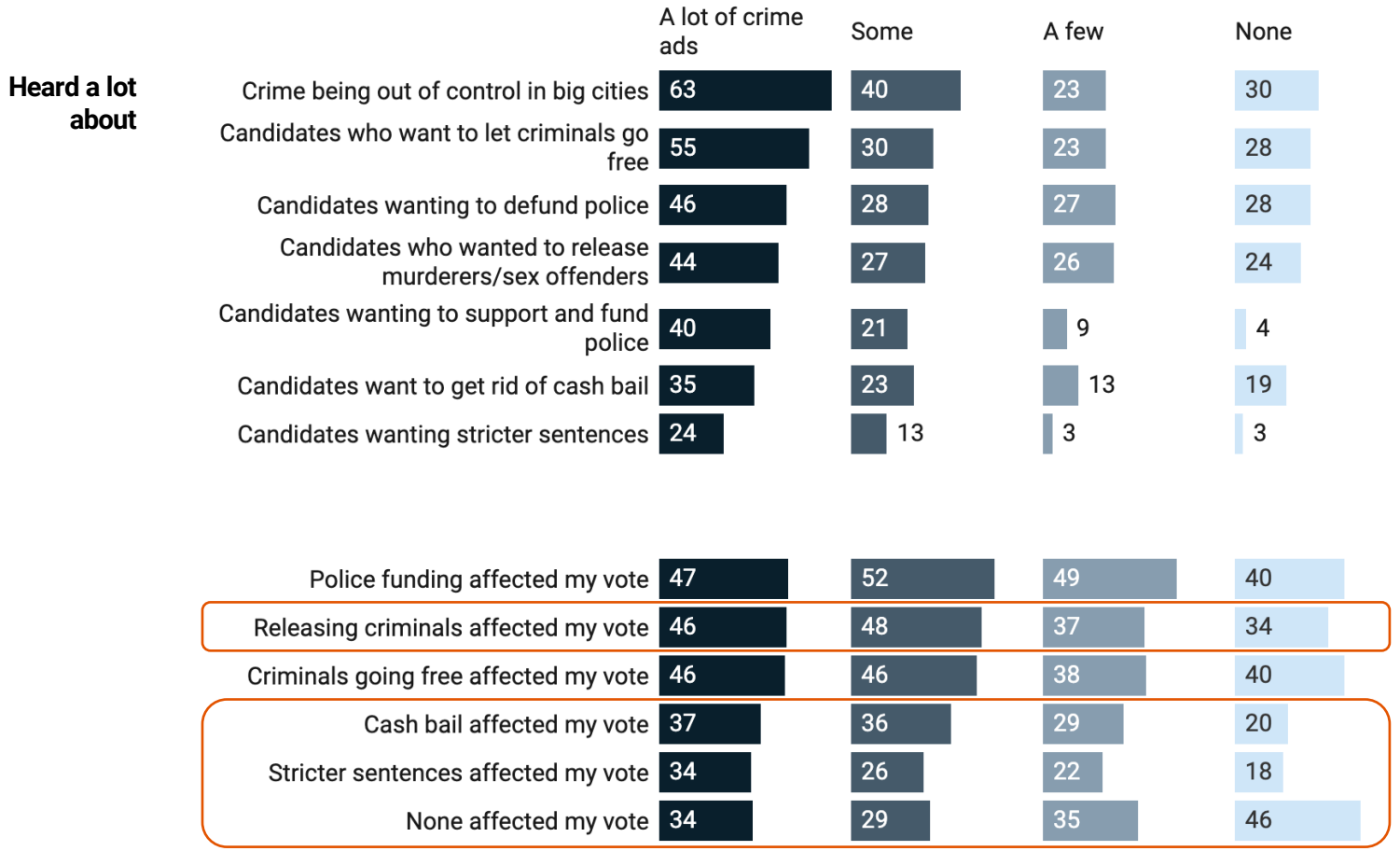
Correlation between ad exposure and attacks

Base n = 622 independents who don't lean Democratic and not so strong Republicans



PERRY UNDEM

In the past month or two, how many political ads have you seen about crime?

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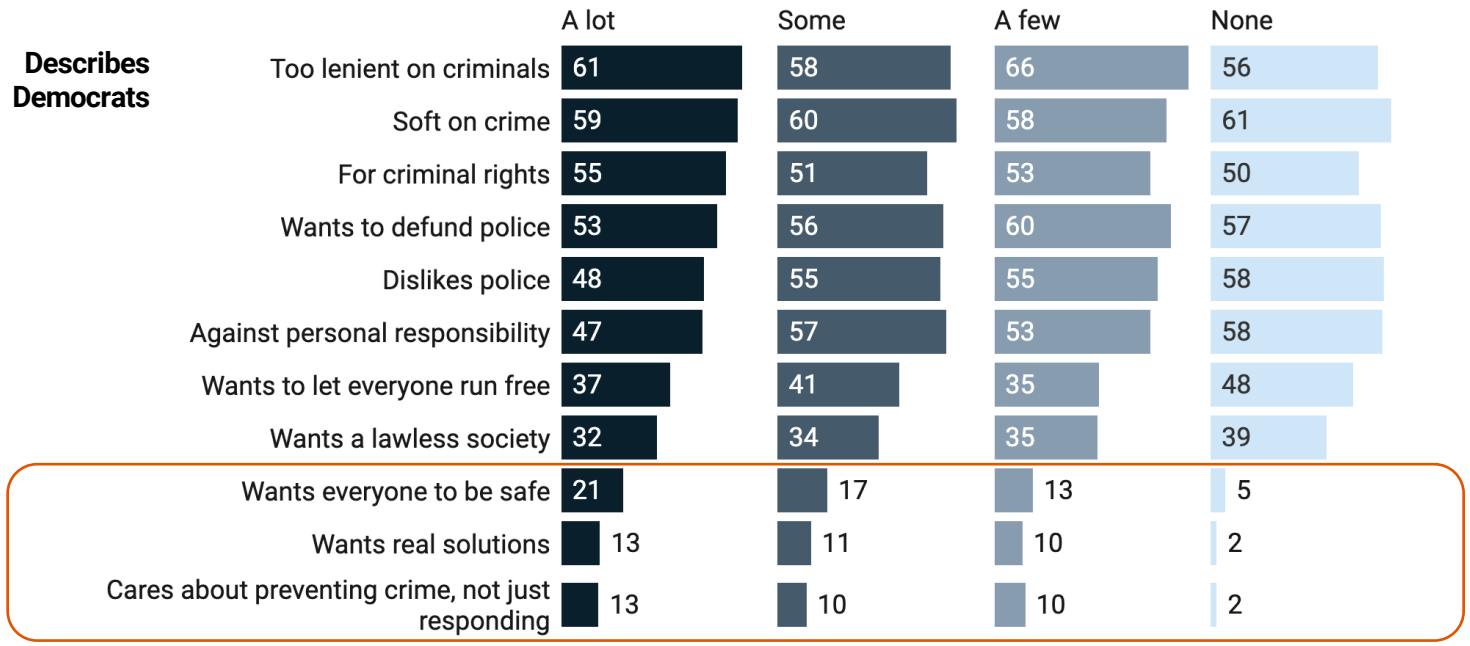

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Data suggest ad exposure reinforced Republicans' brand around:

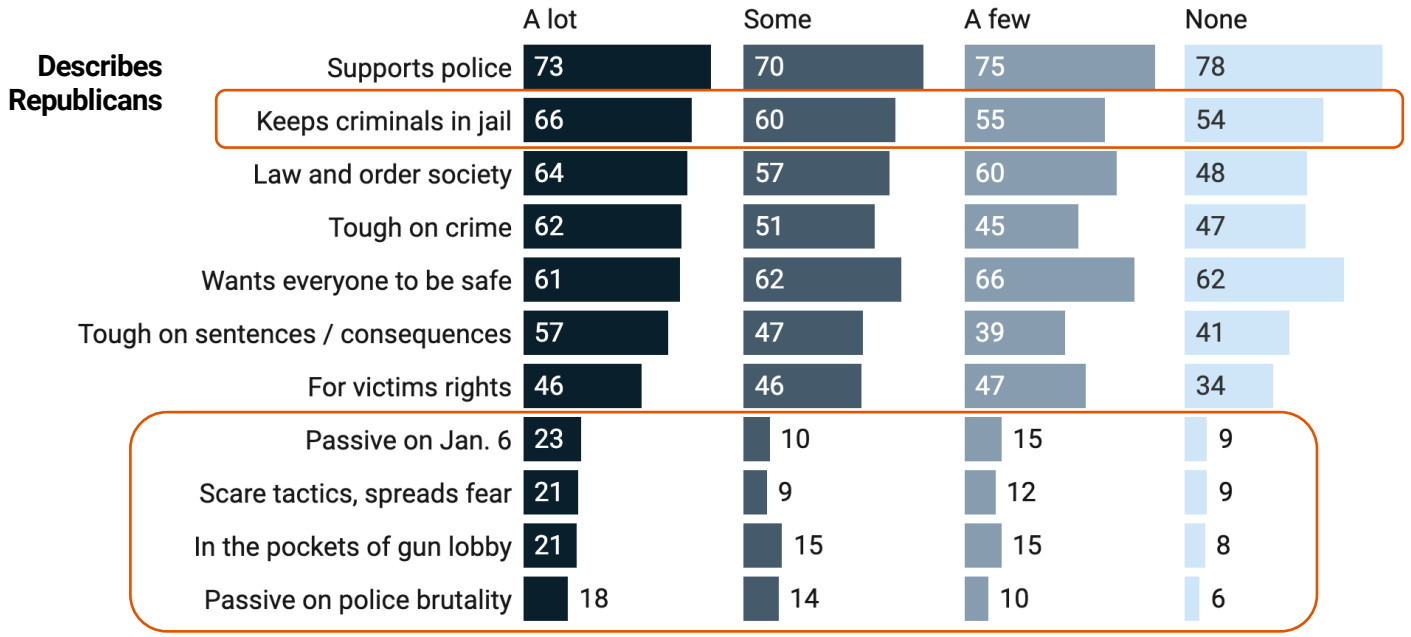
- Being tough on crime
- Keeping criminals in jail
- Law and order society
- Tough on sentences / consequences
- Fighting for victims' rights

But, there may have also been a little damage around:

- Passivity on Jan. 6
- Scare tactics
- In the pockets of the gun lobby
- Passivity on police brutality

In the past month or two, how many political ads have you seen about crime?

Base n = 622 independents who don't lean Democratic and not so strong Republicans



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Effects of ad exposure.

Among Republicans

NO CORRELATION

- House vote
- Straight ticket voting
- Intention to vote straight ticket in future
- Brand attributes of Democrats on crime (if anything slightly positive effect – 41% who say a lot of ads say “wants everyone to be safe” does or sometimes describe Democrats v. 21% who saw no ads)

CORRELATION

- Prioritizing crime as an issue (e.g., 15% who say they saw “a lot” of crime ads say it was their #1 issue v. 2% who saw “no” crime ads)
- Hearing a lot about crime being out of control in big cities
- Saying that attacks affected their vote:
    - Cash bail (44% who saw a lot of ads v. 29% saw none)
    - Releasing criminals (53% v. 39%)
    - Stricter sentences (41% v. 23%)
    - Criminals going free (52% v. 44%)
    - (There’s no correlation between ad exposure and saying police funding affected vote)
- Reinforced Republican brand attributes, especially:
    - Tough on crime (78% who saw a lot of ads say this describes Republicans v. 52% who saw no ads)
    - Wants to solve root causes (72% v. 53%)
    - Tough on sentences (70% v. 53%)
- But, may have damaged Republicans slightly on these attributes:
    - Passive on gun violence / school shootings (20% v. 9%)
    - Passive on Jan. 6 (33% v. 23%)
    - Ignores systemic racism (24% v. 9%)

PERRY UNDEM

Effects of ad exposure.

Among Democrats

NO CORRELATION

- House vote
- Straight ticket voting
- Intention to vote straight ticket in future
- Prioritizing crime as an issue

CORRELATION

- More likely to say one of the conservative attacks affected their voting (32% v. 13%)
- Positive Democratic brand attributes:
    - Wants real solutions (78% who saw “a lot” of ads v. 69% who saw “some” / “a few” / “none)
    - Will work with Rs to get things done (48% v. 42%)
- Positive Republican brand attributes:
    - Will keep criminals in jail (48% who saw “a lot” of ads v. 36% who saw “some” / “a few” / “none)
- Negative Republican attributes:
    - Passive on police brutality (68% v. 52%)
    - Passive on hate crimes / racist attacks (70% v. 53%)
    - Glorifies gun culture (70% v. 53%)
    - Ignores systemic racism (78% v. 66%)

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Did it help Democrats to engage?

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Did hearing from Democrats on crime matter?

Was there a difference between those who heard more from Republicans and those who heard equally or more from Democrats?

58%

Of respondents say they heard more from Republicans on the issue of crime than Democrats

27%

Say they heard equally or more from Democrats

PERRY UNDEM

Data suggest: Yes.

There are many differences among independent and Republican women, as well as among Trump voters when comparing those who heard mostly from Republicans v. those who heard equally or more from Democrats.

See next two pages.

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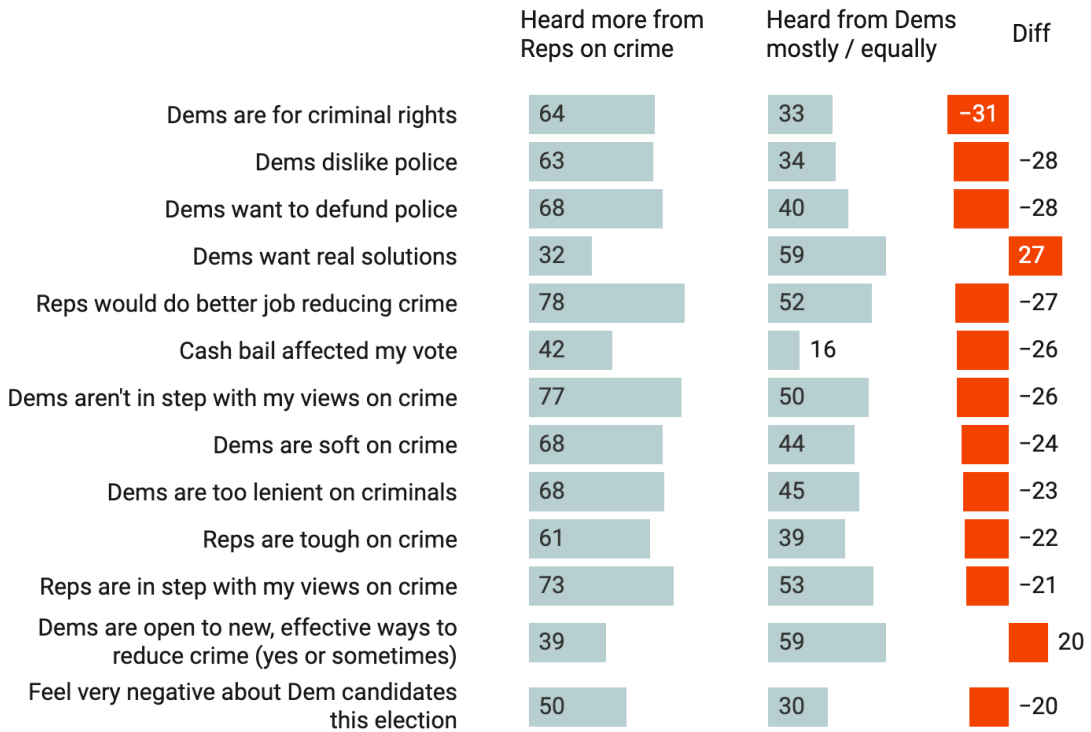
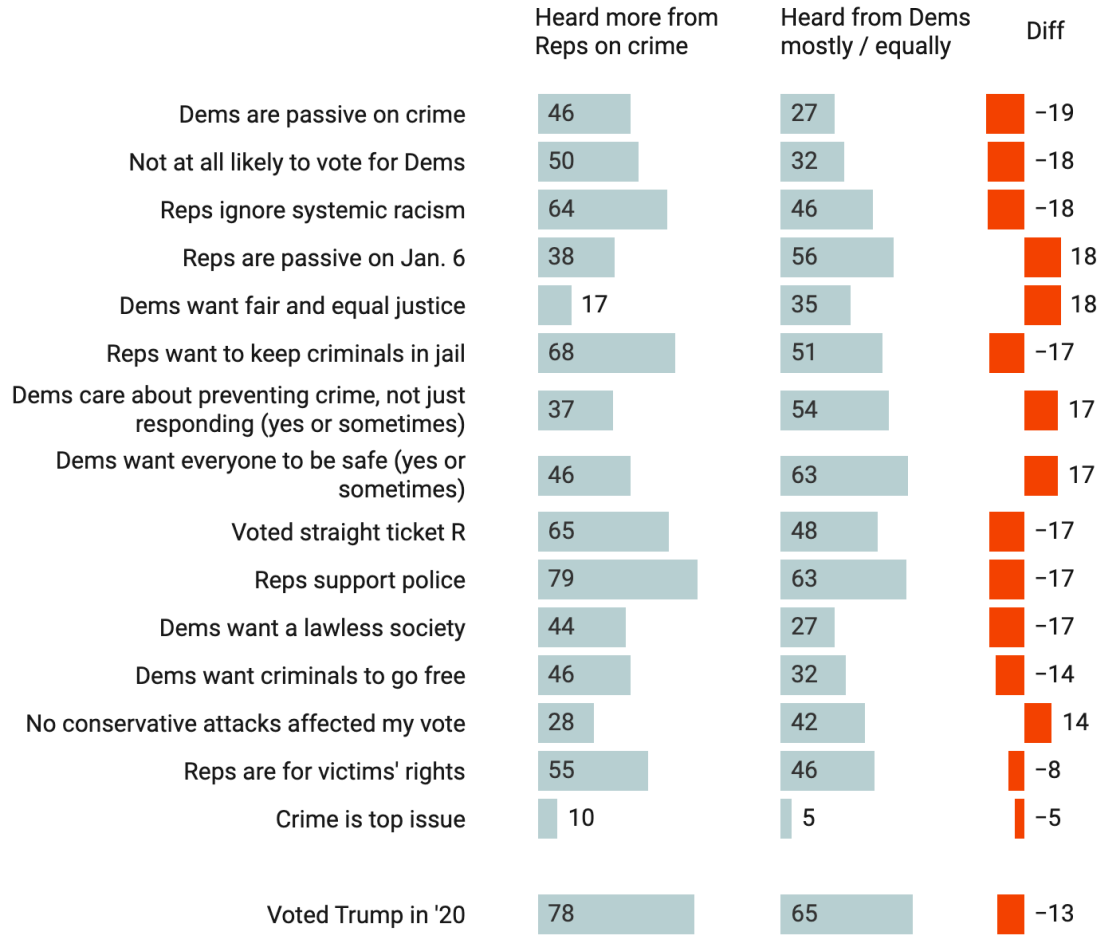
Among Republican and independent women.

Note: Those who heard more from Reps are more likely to be Trump voters (by 13 pts) – so we're looking for differences significantly above 13 points

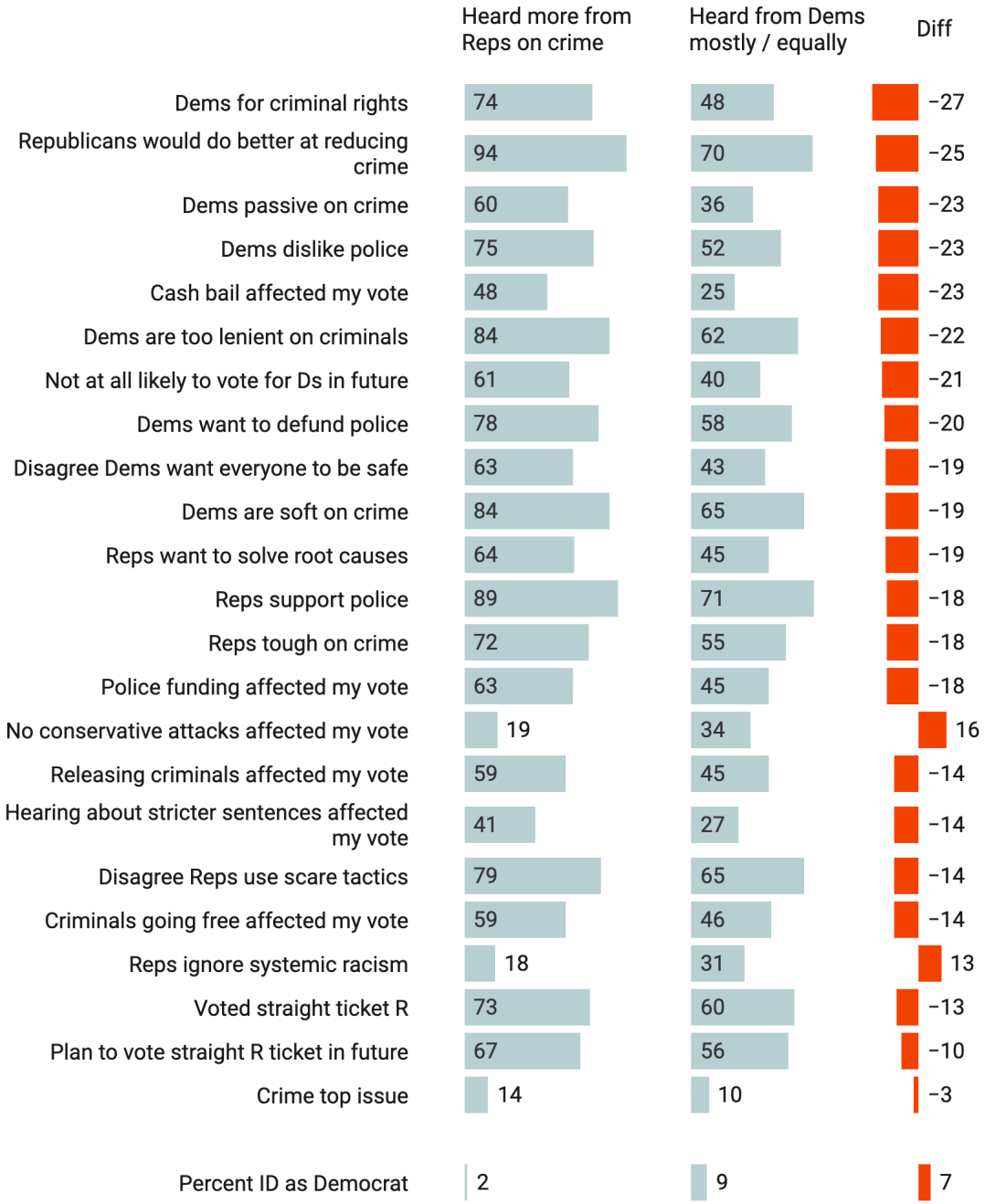




PERRY UNDEM

Among Trump voters.

Note: Those who heard from Democrats are more likely to be Democrats (by 8 pts) – so we're looking for differences significantly above 8 points



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The impact among Democrats is less clear.

Analysis among Democrats is limited because those who heard equally or more from Democrats are significantly less liberal than those who heard from Democrats. In other words, it's very difficult to tease out whether differences (or lack thereof) in views are due to ideology or exposure to ideas and attacks.

That said, there is some indication that those who heard more from Republicans are more likely to say Republicans are tough on sentences and want to keep criminals in jail (even though these respondents are more liberal). Another way to put it: those who heard from Democrats are less likely to ascribe these attributes to Republicans.

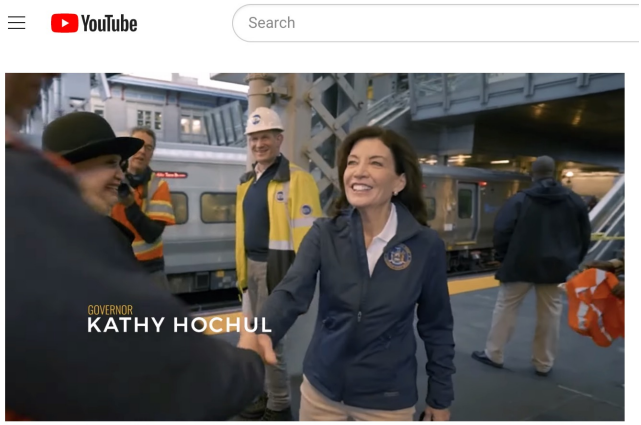
Does viewing a proactive Democratic ad on crime affect opinion?

Half of the sample, selected at random, was asked to watch this Hochul ad. The other half did not view any ads.

We then explored the effects of ad exposure in subsequent questions.

Data suggest the ad had a fairly significant positive effect on women respondents, particularly Democrats and Republicans (less so on independents). See next page.

There was no evidence of impact among men.

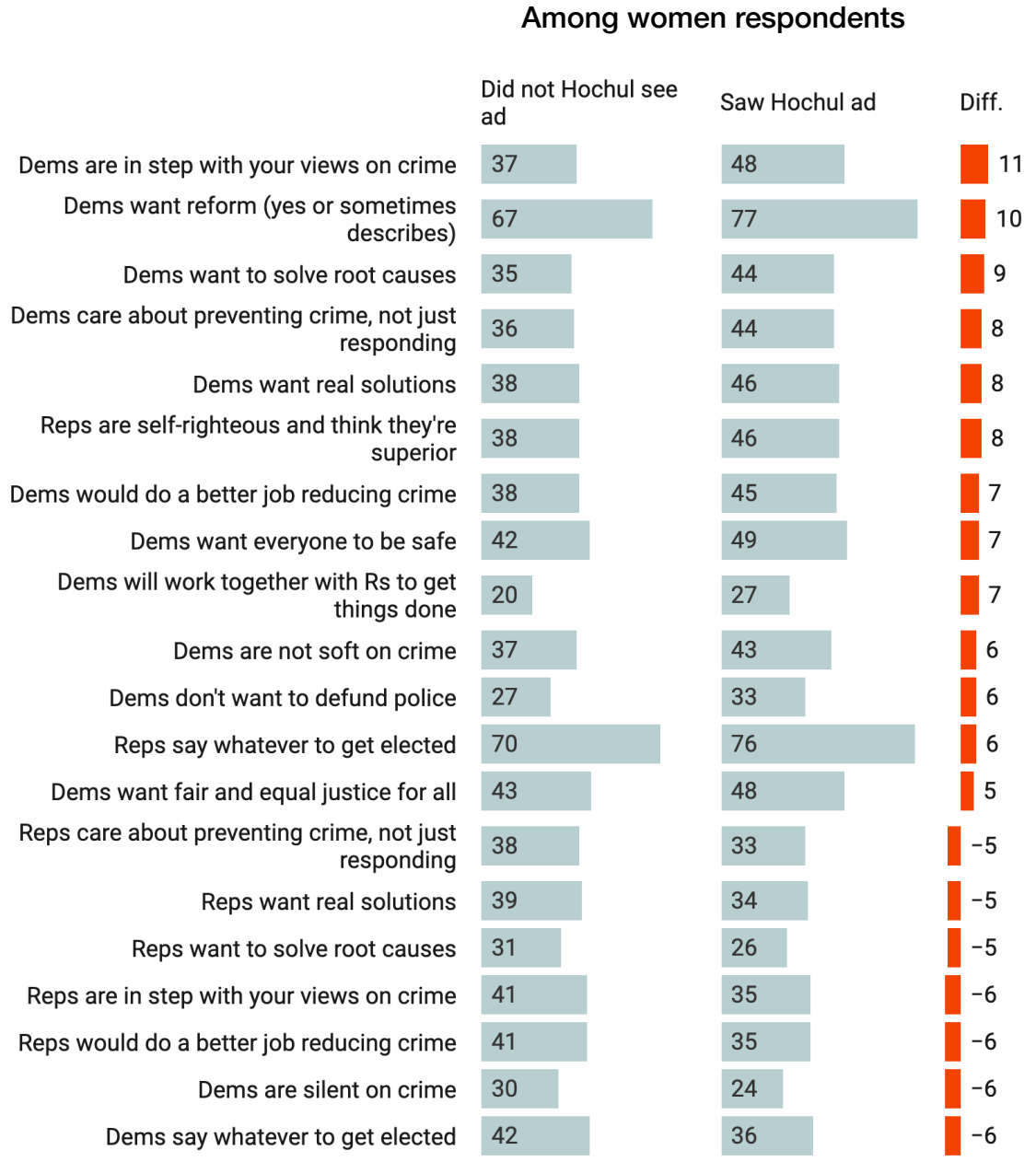


PERRY UNDEM

Of note:

Those who saw the Hochul ad say Democrats would do a better job at reducing crime than Republicans by +10 pts.

Among those who did not see the ad, responses are split (38% say Democrats would do a better job v. 41% say Republicans would).



PERRY UNDEM