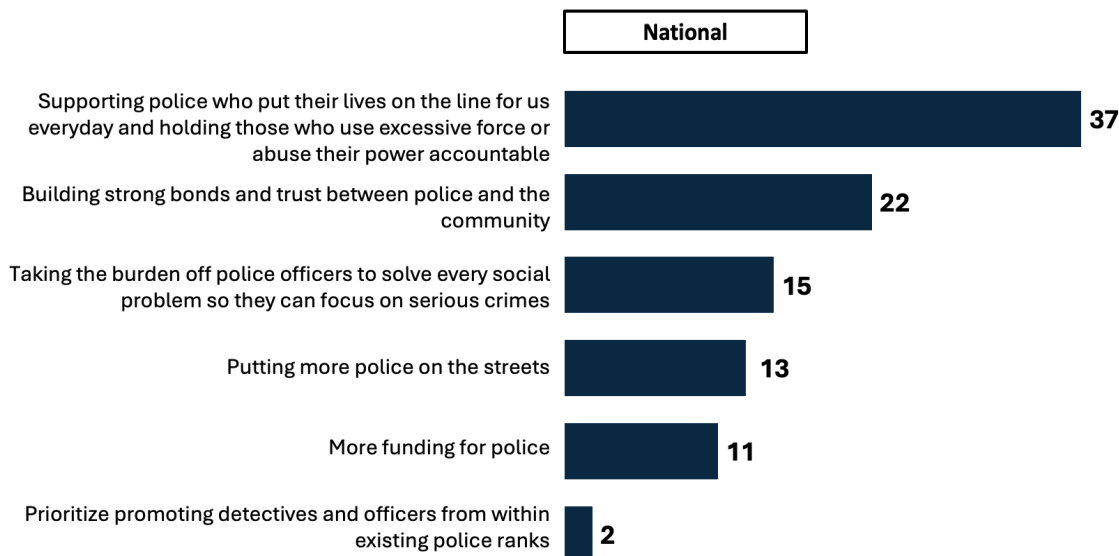


TALKING POINTS ON POLICING

1. On policing, voters prefer support and accountability over unconditional support.

Americans want better policing—not more policing. While voters have favorable opinions of police officers in their community ([76 percent favorability](#)), they also care about police accountability. Voters want to know what their elected officials will do to support the police and hold them accountable when they break the law—more than they want to hear about police funding or hiring more police officers:

Which of the following statements about the police do you support the most, even if none is exactly right:



Source: [GQR National Survey](#) commissioned by Vera Action, September 2023, 5.

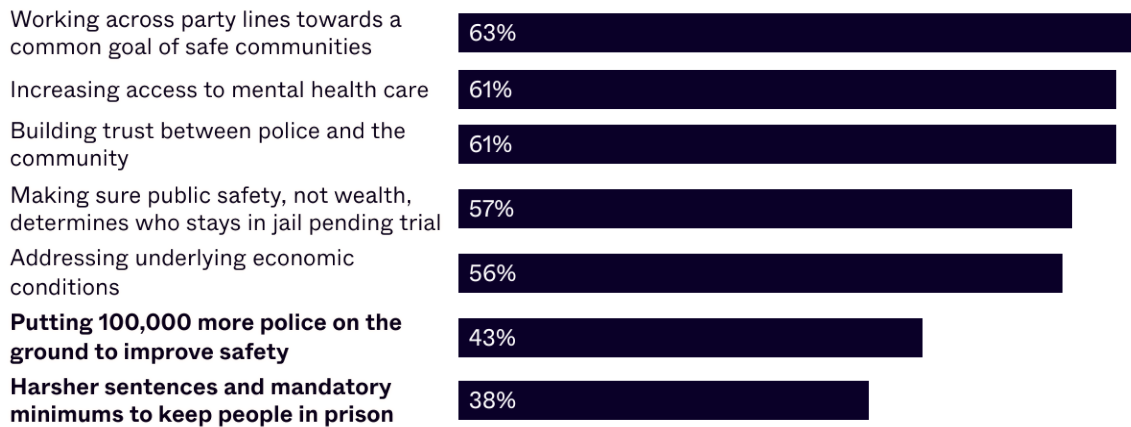
2. Americans understand that police cannot be the response to all of society’s problems.

Too often, we expect police officers to solve every social problem—from homelessness to substance use disorder and mental health crises. The public understands that no one profession can be expected to do that alone: according to [recent research](#), 62 percent of Americans believe “we should not use police officers for mental health distress calls,” and 76 percent believe “we need to do a better job matching the right professional to each 911 call response.”

Moreover, voters also hold favorable opinions of other first responders, including paramedics (92 percent), mental health professionals (81 percent) and community-based violence intervention specialists (68 percent). Instead of just talking about police when it comes to safety, point to [programs](#) that employ these first responders and affirm the need to expand the tools in our public safety toolbox.

Voters are interested in hearing their leaders' ideas about *preventing* crime. Across the political spectrum, solutions to address the root causes of crime are very popular: voters rank increasing mental health care and addressing underlying economic conditions as more effective solutions to fighting crime than harsher sentences or putting thousands more police on the ground. Talk about these strategies often, and reiterate that [we have solutions](#) that promote safety and justice—we do not have to sacrifice one for the other.

Percentage of voters who rank each solution to crime as effective



Source: Vera Action, "[Winning the Narrative on Safety, Accountability, and Justice: Leading with Solutions, Not Scare Tactics](#)," November 2022, 17.

3. Even when facing a “defund” attack, a message that centers safety and justice and focuses on real solutions is effective. When asked which message they agree with more, a typical “soft on crime” attack or an affirmative vision for safety and justice, 57 percent pick the latter.

THE ATTACK: My opposition’s 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. My opposition wants to defund the police and and create chaos. We need to vote them out to keep us safe.

43%

RESPONSE W/ SAFETY: 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.

57%

Source: [PerryUndem post-2022 midterms battleground survey](#) commissioned by Vera Action, November 2022.

4. When put on the defense with a “defund” attack, pivoting to solutions is significantly more effective than touting support for more police funding. Voters want elected leaders

to have serious conversations about solutions for safety. Faced with a “defund” attack, polling shows that Democrats win when they call out the scare-tactics and call for new solutions, while they lose when they get into an arms race with Republicans over who is “defunding” law enforcement. Democrats are in a stronger position when moving the debate to their own narrative playing field of safety.

In April 2024, Vera Action tested two different responses to the same “defund” attack shown above (in #3). Half the respondents were shown a response focused on calling out Republican hypocrisy and touting support for law enforcement funding. The other half of respondents saw Vera Action’s message that calls out the opposition’s fearmongering and pivots to real solutions.

The Vera Action message outperformed the Republican attack 47-43, while the “tough” Democratic message lost by a 40-47 margin, indicating that Democrats struggle when they keep the debate centered on trading “defund” allegations. Talking about real solutions for preventing crime, responding to crisis, and stopping violence meets voters where they are.

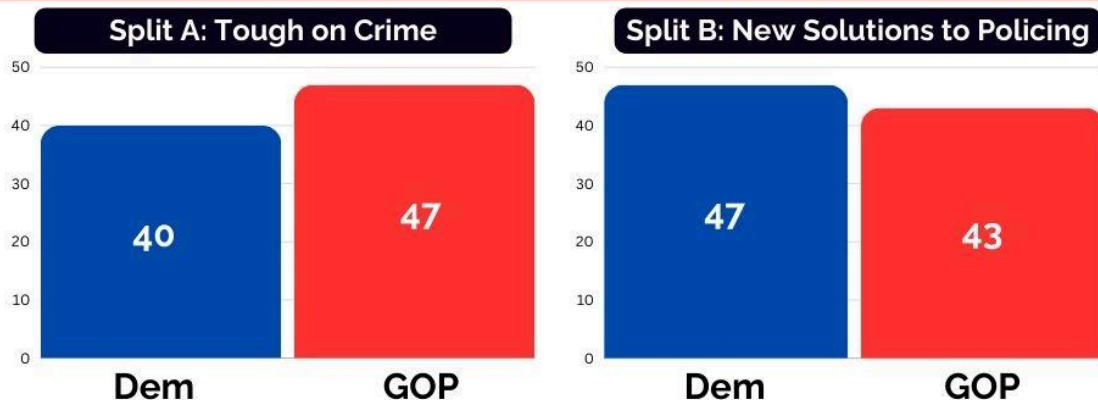
Support for Congressional candidate

By Democratic crime and law enforcement messaging condition

SPLIT A, DEM 'TOUGH ON CRIME': The Democrat has said, "MAGA Republicans are pushing a soft-on-crime agenda to defund the police, pardon violent insurrectionists, and align with convicted criminals. Their extreme agenda seeks to undermine the Justice Department and abolish the FBI. I support increasing funding for our police departments, while Republicans propose massive cuts to crime-fighting agencies and side with violent January 6 insurrectionists over law enforcement."

SPLIT B, DEM 'NEW SOLUTIONS': The Democrat has said, "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."

BOTH CONDITIONS / GOP 'DEFUND' ATTACK: The Republican has said, "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."



Source: YouGov, Congressional Candidates Messaging Experiments, April 2024.