

To: Interested Parties
 From: YouGov Blue and Vera Action
 Re: Owning a "serious about safety" message is a more effective way to reach voters on crime than focusing on Trump's conviction
 Date: June 20, 2024

Donald Trump was convicted of 34 felony counts after trial on May 30. Many Democrats seized upon this outcome to demonstrate their "law and order" bona fides, calling Trump a "convicted criminal" and criticizing Republicans for aligning with him. Vera Action and YouGov fielded message tests to examine the effectiveness of that messaging frame on voters.

In a national YouGov survey conducted June 12 to June 14, 2024, on 1,003 registered voters, we compared a typical Republican "tough-on-crime" message against two different Democratic messages. One of the Democratic messages blasted Republicans for undermining the police while siding with Trump even after his criminal conviction, which closely resembles the Biden campaign's [recent messaging](#) seeking to capitalize on the guilty verdict in the Trump trial. The other Democratic message leads with a "serious about safety" frame emphasizing the values of safety, accountability, and justice.

The survey found that a Democratic candidate who leads with a "serious about safety" message outperforms a GOP candidate running on a "tough-on-crime" platform by eight points. However, a Democratic candidate who focuses on Trump's recent criminal conviction and attacks the GOP for "protecting a convicted felon" loses by three points to the same GOP opponent.

Support for Congressional Candidate

By Democratic Messaging Condition on Crime



These results build upon other recent message testing by Vera Action in partnership with YouGov. In April, [Vera Action and YouGov tested](#) two different Democratic messages against a GOP defund attack. One Democratic message owned a “serious about safety” approach to public safety while the other accused the GOP of being the real “soft-on-crime” party that wants to “defund the police” and pardon January 6 insurrectionists. While a Democrat owning a “serious about safety” message outperformed a Republican rival by four points, the Democratic candidate who stayed on the opposition’s narrative turf ended up [losing to a Republican by seven points](#).

Previous research and polling has found that voters are indeed concerned about issues of crime and safety. Yet these results suggest that Democrats would have more success addressing voter concerns on this issue with a “serious about safety” approach rather than trying to attack Republicans from the right.

While no conclusions can be drawn from this test about whether it is effective for Democratic candidates to campaign on Trump’s criminal conviction and the January 6 insurrection in general, the results strongly suggest that focusing heavily on Trump as a “convicted felon” and using “law and order” rhetoric does not sufficiently address voter concerns on crime and safety.

A second test from the June survey explored three different statements about crime: a “serious about safety” message on investments in community solutions to prevent crime, a message focused on declining crime rates and giving the police more resources, and a conservative message criticizing the “defund” movement and vowing to restore “law and order.”

We found that a majority of respondents (51 percent) said that of the three statements, the “serious about safety” message came closest to their view, while one-third (33 percent) sided with the “law and order” statement and just 12 percent selected the message on supporting the police and touting declining crime rates.

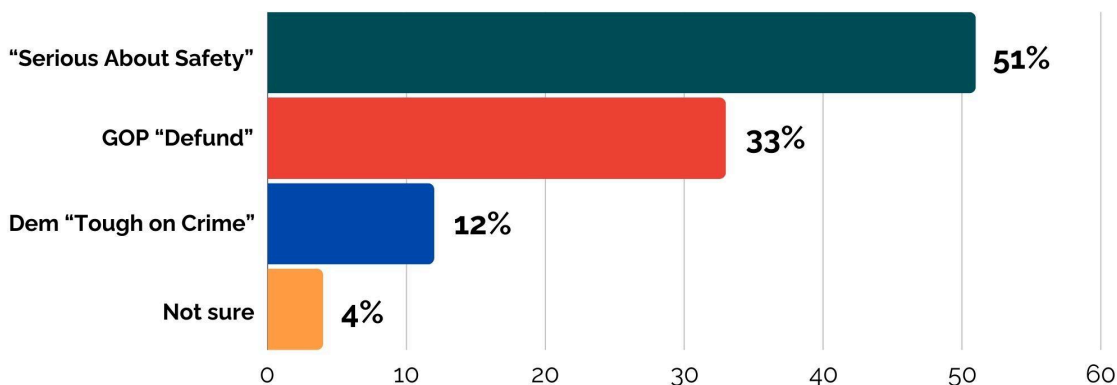
Voters Prefer a “Serious About Safety” Message

Question: “Which statement comes closest to your view?”

“Serious About Safety” Message: We all want the same thing: safe communities to live in that are free of violence. We deserve leaders who are serious about safety and will fully fund things that are proven to improve people’s quality of life, like good schools, job opportunities, and affordable housing.

GOP “Defund” Message: Those who have defunded and defamed our heroic police have given us more crime, more chaos, and tragically, more deaths. We must restore law and order by revitalizing police departments and reclaiming safety, dignity, and peace of mind for law-abiding Americans.

Dem “Tough on Crime” Message: Facts are facts: crime rates have fallen sharply in recent years since the dramatic rise during the pandemic. While we’ve made progress, we can’t stop now. Let’s bring crime rates down even further by putting more cops on the beat and holding violent criminals accountable.



This message test shows that while Democrats have a strong record of [falling crime rates](#) to run on, it’s not enough to simply point at the statistics. Candidates running for office can acknowledge that many people [feel unsafe](#); tout solutions that [successfully bring down](#) crime rates; invest in the things proven to improve people’s quality life, like [education](#), [jobs](#), and [housing](#); and pledge that they will continue to work until everyone feels safe.

As Democrats consider how to approach public safety issues in their campaigns, this survey indicates that solutions-focused “serious about safety” messages resonate strongly with voters, while keeping the debate on which candidate is most tough on crime appears to benefit Republicans.