WE NEED TO BE "SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY," NOT "TOUGH ON CRIME":

Winning the narrative on safety, accountability, and justice in Wisconsin

September 2024

Vera ACTION

RECENT ELECTIONS HAVE SHOWN STRONG DEMOCRATIC MOMENTUM IN WISCONSIN

For the first time in 15 years, liberals win control of the Wisconsin Supreme Court

Evers' win shows promising trends for Democrats

Evers won big in Dane County, eroded GOP support in the suburbs and mobilized young people to win reelection
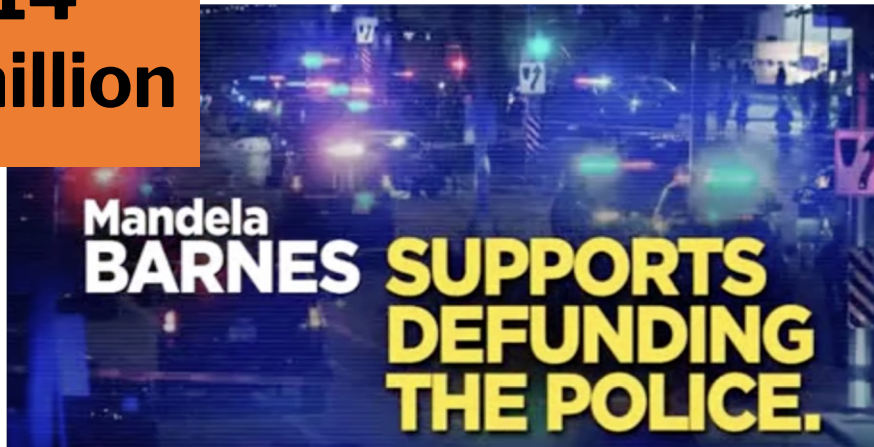
ELECTIONS

Wisconsin Democrats built a winning machine.

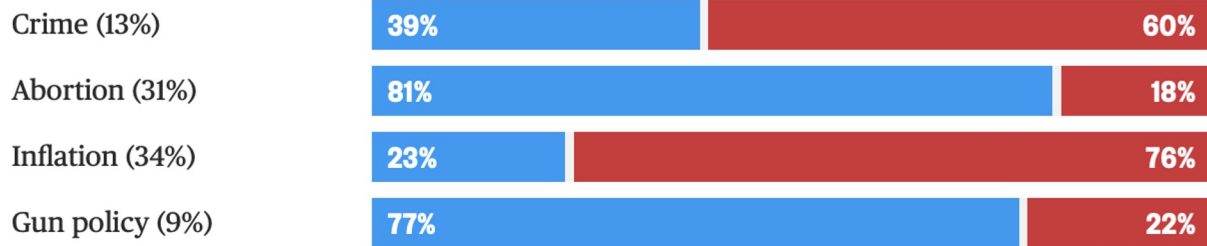# BUT "SOFT ON CRIME" ATTACKS HAVE UNDERMINED DEMOCRATS WHEN LEFT UN-MET

POLITICS • 2022 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

How Crime Became the Central Issue of the Wisconsin Senate Race—and the Midterms

$14 million

Mandela BARNES **SUPPORTS DEFUNDING THE POLICE.**

Which ONE of these five issues mattered most in deciding how you voted today:

Issue	Dem	Rep
Crime (13%)	39%	60%
Abortion (31%)	81%	18%
Inflation (34%)	23%	76%
Gun policy (9%)	77%	22%

TEXT EARLY VOT...

THE BIG TAKEAWAY FROM WISCONSIN POLLING:
As fear-based rhetoric and political attacks about crime and immigration are on the rise, Wisconsin electeds have an opportunity to own a message that is not only good policy, but good politics, resonating with Wisconsin voters across the board, but especially swing/Independent voters:

"I am serious about safety, stability, and security."

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METHODOLOGY

Global Strategy Group conducted a survey of 800 likely voters in Wisconsin between July 8 and July 14, 2024.

An oversample of an additional 250 interviews were conducted among Milwaukee County voters for a total of 359 interviews among Milwaukee voters and a total of 1,050 interviews overall.

The margin of error at the 95% confidence level for is +/- 3.5%.

The margin of error at the 95% confidence level for the split sample is +/- 5.2%.

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DEMOGRAPHICS

Party ID

Democrats	30
Independents	33
Republicans	37

Ideology

Liberal	30
Moderate	24
Conservative	44

Region

Duluth-Superior/Minneapolis-St. Paul	7
Green Bay-Appleton	19
La Crosse-Eau Claire	8
Madison	19
Milwaukee County	14
Milwaukee Rest	25
Wausau-Rhinelander	8

Education

High School or Less	20
Some College	51
College Graduates	21
Post Graduate	13

Gender

Men	48
Women	52

Age

18-44 year olds	28
45-64 year olds	38
65+ year olds	35

Race

White	93
Black	3
Hispanic	2
Asian	2

Income

Less than $25,000	8
$25,000-$49,999	13
$50,000-$74,999	15
$75,000-$99,999	17
$100,000-$149,999	18
$150,000 or more	17

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SWING VOTER TARGETS INCLUDE BOTH MODERATES AND SOMEWHAT LIBERAL VOTERS, AS WELL AS YOUNGER AND URBAN AREA VOTERS

30	25	11	34

Base	**Swing**	**Other**	**Oppo**
<u>Always</u> votes Democrat	Votes Democrat sometimes, but not always	Not Base, Swing, or Oppo	<u>Always</u> votes Republican

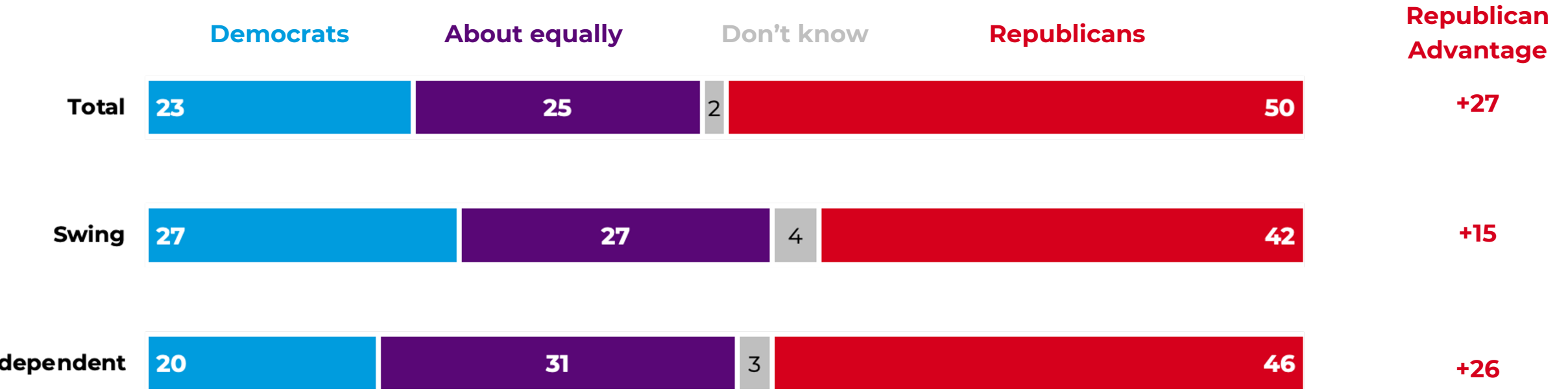| Base	Swing	Oppo
Black voters (49% are base)	**Independents (38% are swing)**	**Rural voters (42% are oppo)**
Urban voters (41%)	**POC voters (34%)**	**Non-college men (39%)**
Milwaukee County voters (40%)	**Age 18-44 (33%)**	
College graduates (39%)	**Urban voters (33%)**	
Madison DMA voters (38%)	**Moderates (33%)**	
Suburban voters (35%)	**Milwaukee County voters (32%)**	
Women (33%)	**<$50K HH income (31%)**	
	Somewhat liberal voters (31%)	
	Madison DMA voters (30%)	

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TAKEAWAY #1.
Silence is deadly. Leaning into safety, accountability, and justice–and owning these values affirmatively–will overcome the partisan volume and trust gaps.
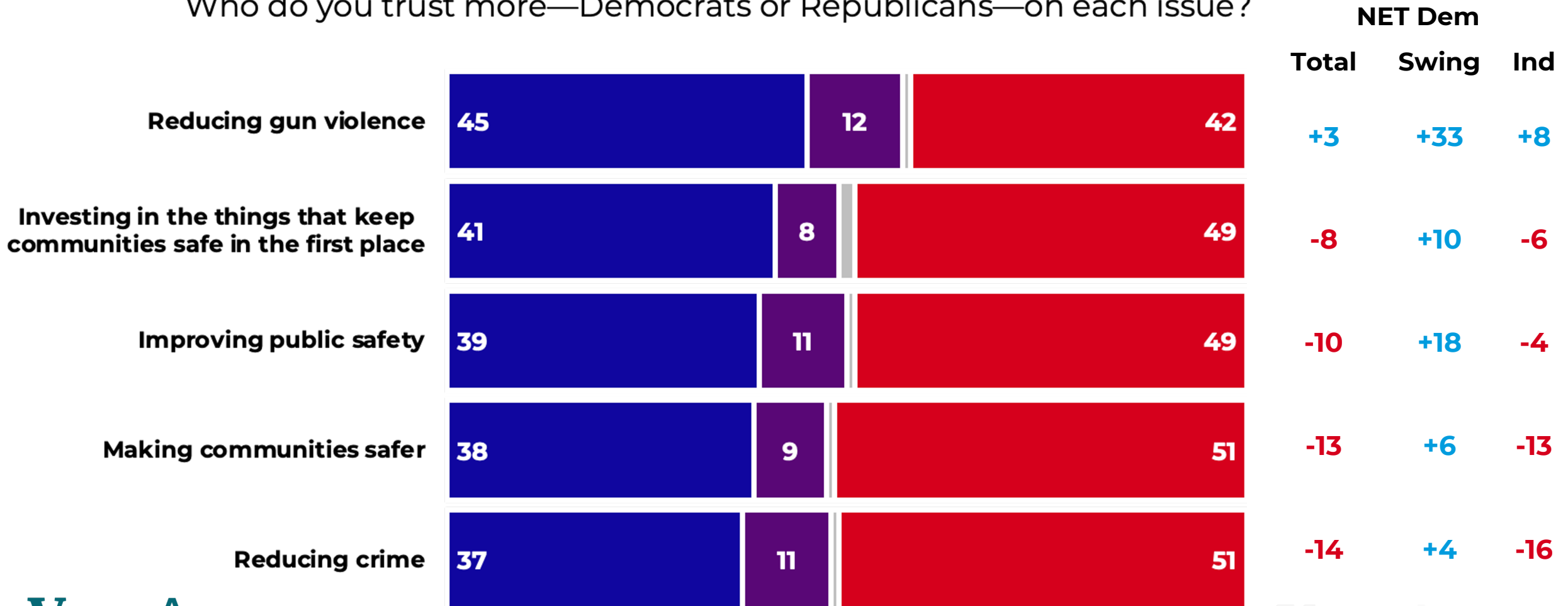
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WI REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES ARE CURRENTLY DOMINATING THE DEBATE ON CRIME AND SAFETY

Who do you hear from more—Democrats or Republicans—on crime and safety?

	Democrats	About equally	Don't know	Republicans	Republican Advantage
Total	23	25	2	50	+27
Swing	27	27	4	42	+15
Independent	20	31	3	46	+26

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WI DEMOCRATS' RELATIVE SILENCE FUELS VOTER DISTRUST ON THEIR HANDLING OF THESE ISSUES

Who do you trust more—Democrats or Republicans—on each issue?

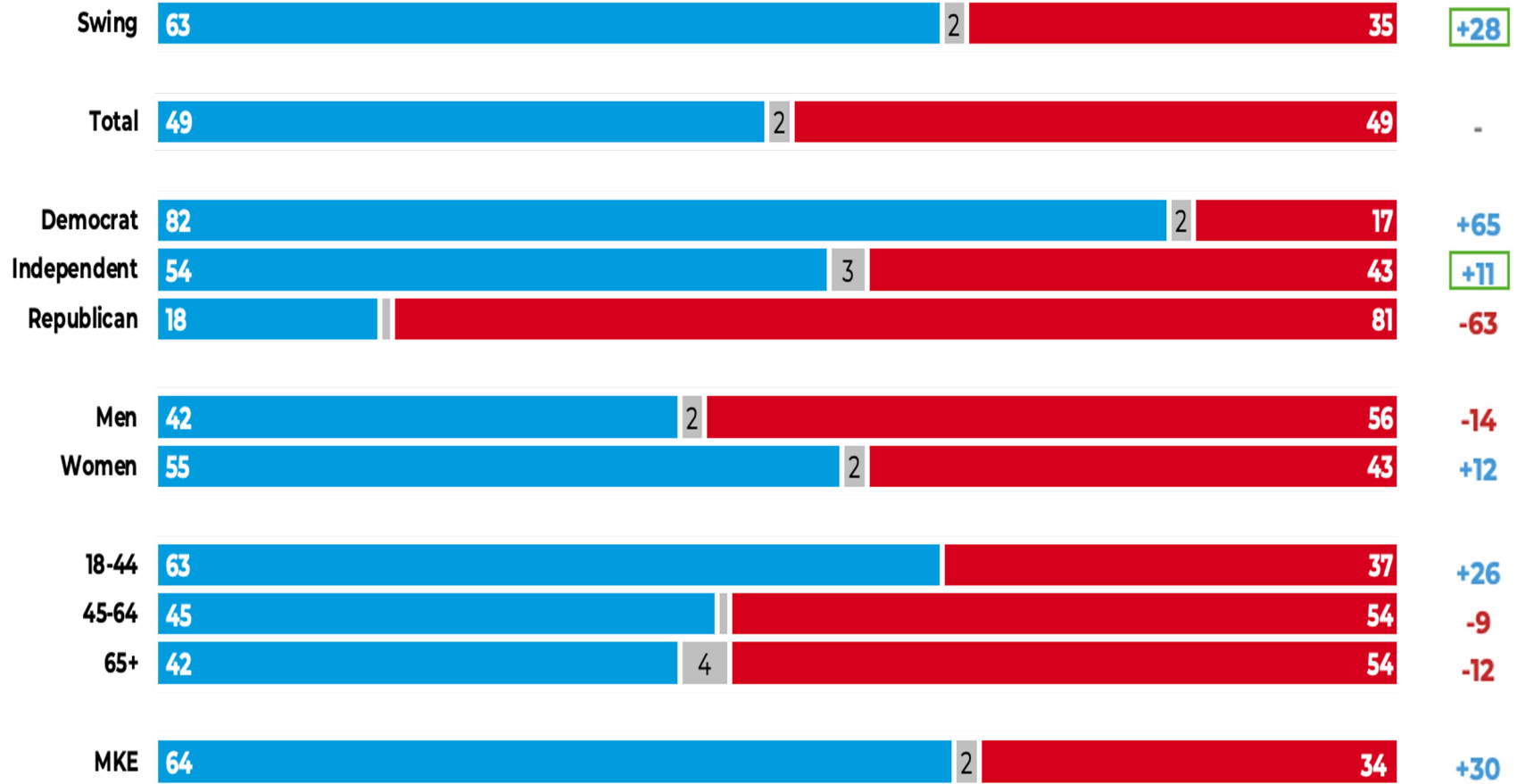|				NET Dem		
				Total	**Swing**	**Ind**
Reducing gun violence	45	12	42	+3	+33	+8
Investing in the things that keep communities safe in the first place	41	8	49	-8	+10	-6
Improving public safety	39	11	49	-10	+18	-4
Making communities safer	38	9	51	-13	+6	-13
Reducing crime	37	11	51	-14	+4	-16

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TAKEAWAY #2.
Wisconsin voters—including swing voters and even independent voters— favor a "serious about safety" message over a "tough-on-crime" one.

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SWING VOTERS IN WI PREFER A "SERIOUS" APPROACH OVER MORE "TOUGH ON CRIME"

[SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY] Fully funding things to create safe communities and improve people's quality of life, like good schools, a living wage, affordable housing, and do more to prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and getting illegal guns off the street.

[TOUGH ON CRIME] Doing more to get tough on crime, like having tougher sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep potentially dangerous people in jail, and providing police more support and resources.

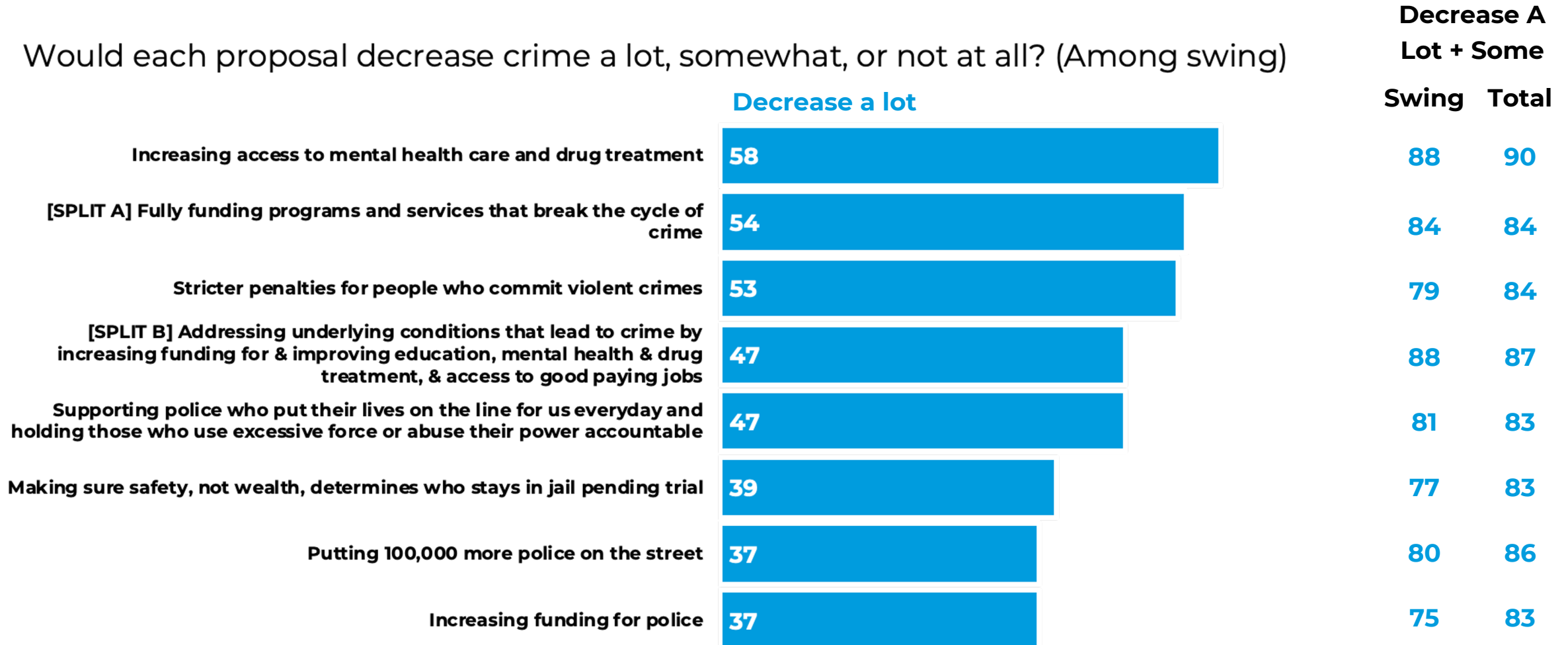Which do you believe would be more effective at reducing crime in Wisconsin?

Group	Serious	Neither	Tough	Margin
Swing	63	2	35	+28
Total	49	2	49	-
Democrat	82	2	17	+65
Independent	54	3	43	+11
Republican	18		81	-63
Men	42	2	56	-14
Women	55	2	43	+12
18-44	63		37	+26
45-64	45		54	-9
65+	42	4	54	-12
MKE	64	2	34	+30

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TAKEAWAY #3
Wisconsinites prefer prevention and treatment solutions over more "tough-on-crime" policies.

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WI VOTERS FAVOR MENTAL HEALTH AND DRUG TREATMENT OVER MORE FUNDING FOR POLICE

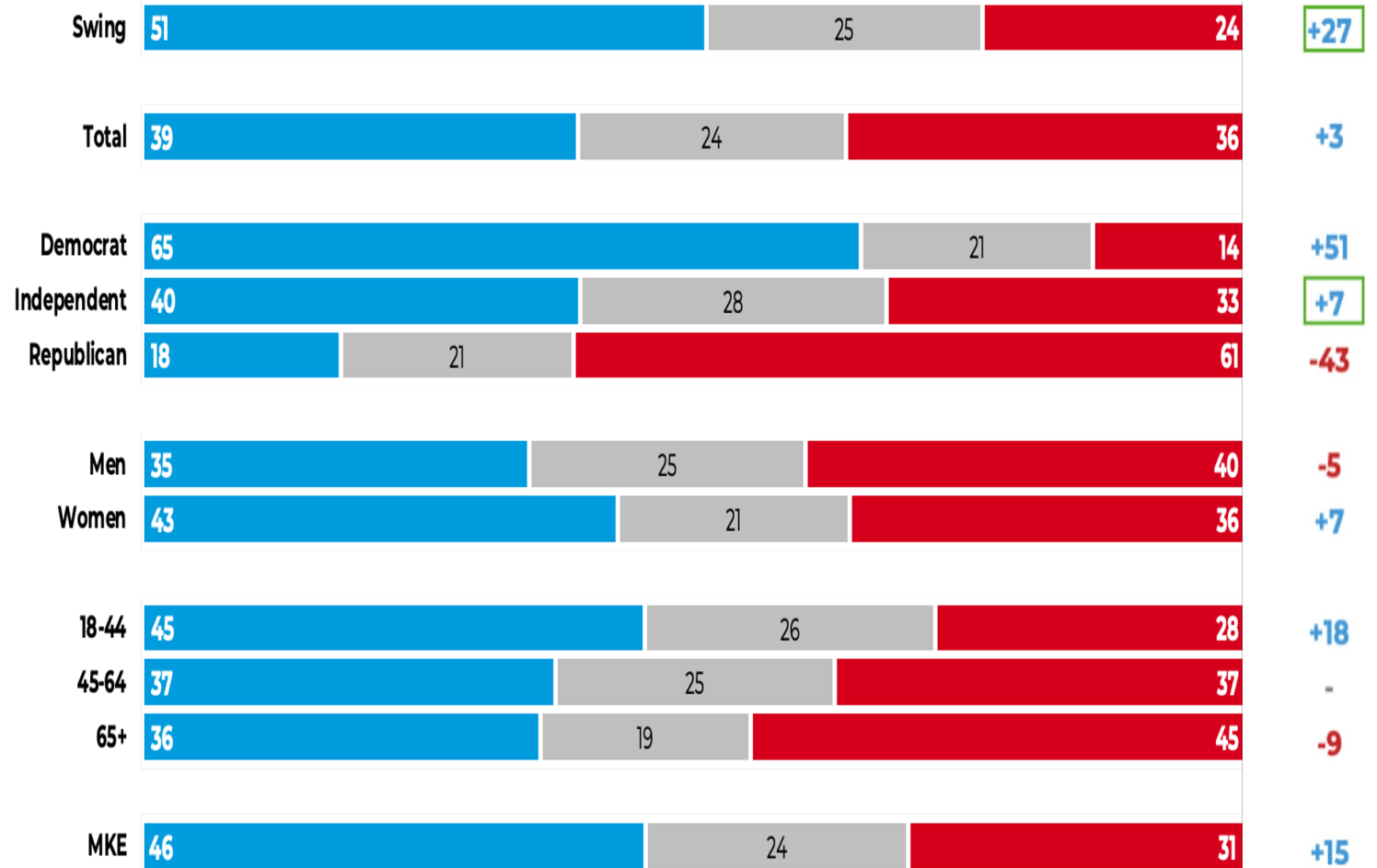Would each proposal decrease crime a lot, somewhat, or not at all? (Among swing)

Decrease a lot

	Decrease a lot	Decrease A Lot + Some Swing	Decrease A Lot + Some Total
Increasing access to mental health care and drug treatment	58	88	90
[SPLIT A] Fully funding programs and services that break the cycle of crime	54	84	84
Stricter penalties for people who commit violent crimes	53	79	84
[SPLIT B] Addressing underlying conditions that lead to crime by increasing funding for & improving education, mental health & drug treatment, & access to good paying jobs	47	88	87
Supporting police who put their lives on the line for us everyday and holding those who use excessive force or abuse their power accountable	47	81	83
Making sure safety, not wealth, determines who stays in jail pending trial	39	77	83
Putting 100,000 more police on the street	37	80	86
Increasing funding for police	37	75	83

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TAKEAWAY #4.
Accountability matters, but Wisconsinites want more than a punishment-only approach.

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WISCONSINITES KNOW THAT ACCOUNTABILITY DOES NOT SIMPLY MEAN MORE PUNISHMENT

[SAFETY AND JUSTICE] Some say crime is out of control, and to make communities safe, people who break the law must be held accountable. This means seeing the harm they've done, accepting the consequences, learning from mistakes, and changing their behavior. Harsh punishment and long sentences alone lead to more violence. We need to provide people with programs that work to turn their lives around and prevent future crime.

[DO THE CRIME, DO THE TIME] Others say crime is out of control, and we need to make sure that people who break the law are held accountable by enforcing strict punishments. If you do the crime, you should do the time and that means serving the full sentence. Offenders shouldn't be able to get out of jail or prison early simply because they complete programs or have a good track record behind bars.

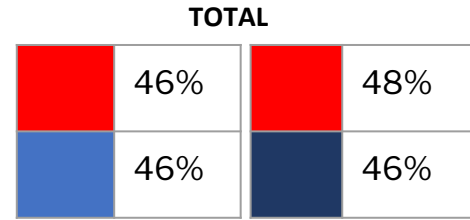Which statement do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly your point of view?

Group	Agree (blue)	Neither (gray)	Disagree (red)	Net
Swing	51	25	24	+27
Total	39	24	36	+3
Democrat	65	21	14	+51
Independent	40	28	33	+7
Republican	18	21	61	-43
Men	35	25	40	-5
Women	43	21	36	+7
18-44	45	26	28	+18
45-64	37	25	37	-
65+	36	19	45	-9
MKE	46	24	31	+15

Source: GSG July 2024 Wisconsin survey commissioned by Vera Action

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TAKEAWAY #5.
Even when facing attacks, leaning
into a "serious about safety"
message helps inoculate against
"soft on crime" or "migrant crime" attacks.

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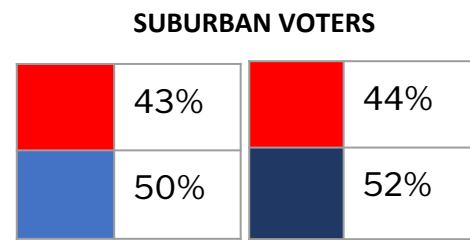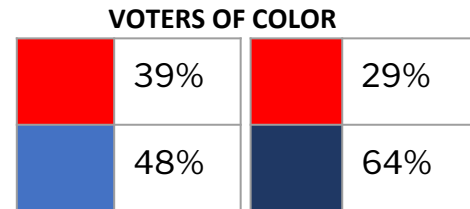# AGAINST "SOFT ON CRIME" ATTACKS, A "SERIOUS" APPROACH PERFORMS JUST AS WELL A "TOUGH" ONE

GOP ATTACK: I am tackling crime and protecting law-abiding Wisconsinites. I will stop the revolving door for criminals, make sure criminals serve their full sentence and force prosecutors to prosecute all cases, big and small. I will "back the Blue" by increasing police funding and putting more officers on the streets. Unlike Democrats, who support "soft on crime" policies like eliminating cash bail and releasing violent criminals from prison early, I will restore law and order to stop crime.

DEM "SMART ON CRIME": I will restore law and order to Wisconsin's communities. Addressing crime means getting illegal guns off the street, improving police response times and solving serious crime. I will add more funding for police, crack down on violent criminals, and go after the worst offenders by imposing stricter sentences. Unlike Republicans, who talk a big game but oppose common-sense gun safety laws, I know what works to be both tough and smart on crime.

DEM "SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY": I will make Wisconsin's communities safer and prevent crime before it happens by investing in schools, housing, and mental health and addiction programs. Addressing violent crime means getting illegal guns off the street, improving police response times, and solving serious crime. I support police who put their lives on the line but also hold them accountable for abuse. Unlike Republicans, who oppose programs that prevent crime and common-sense gun laws, I have solutions that work to make every neighborhood safe.

TOTAL

|			
46%		48%	
46%		46%	

+2

* within margin of error

VOTERS OF COLOR

39%		29%	
48%		64%	

+26

SUBURBAN VOTERS

43%		44%	
50%		52%	

+1

* within margin of error

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AGAINST "DEFUND," BEING "SERIOUS" IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN A "DEFUND" COUNTERATTACK

GOP ATTACK: The Left has allowed a culture built on hating the police to drive decisions surrounding law enforcement. The hostile climate for police has discouraged proactive police work. 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.

DEM "TOUGH ON CRIME/JAN 6TH": MAGA Republicans are pushing a soft on crime agenda to defund the police, pardon violent insurrectionists, and align with convicted criminals. I support increasing funding for our police departments, while Republicans side with violent January 6th insurrectionists and a convicted felon over law enforcement.

DEM "SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY": 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, and 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.
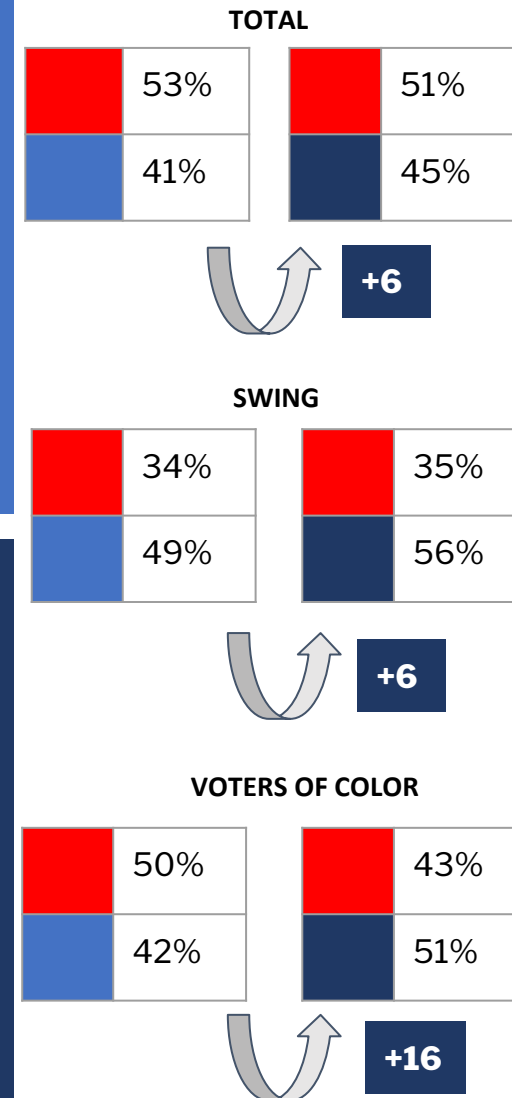
TOTAL

51%	50%
38%	44%

+7

SWING

40%	38%
36%	51%

+17

INDEPENDENTS

51%	49%
32%	46%

+16

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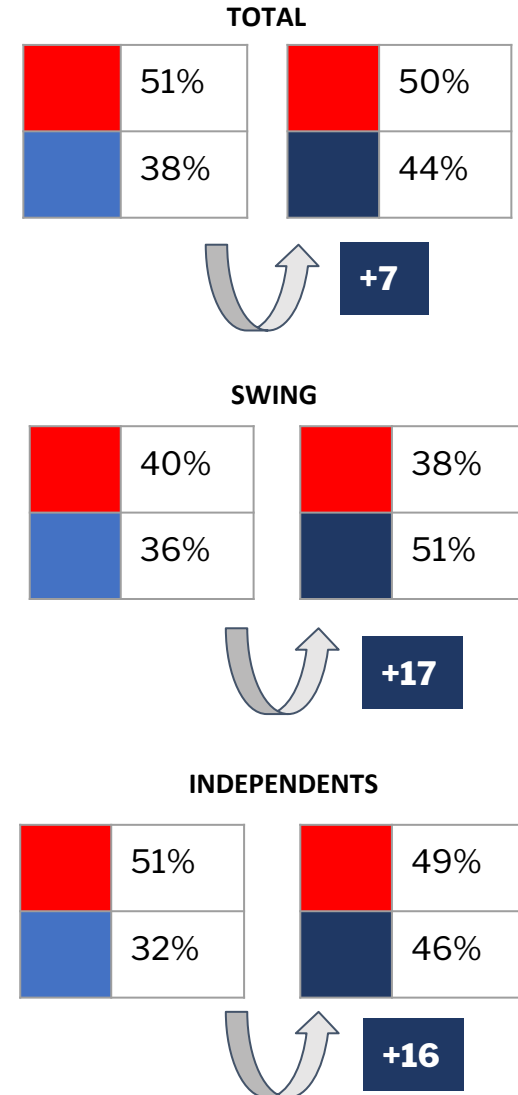
WHEN FACING "MIGRANT CRIME WAVE" ATTACKS, A "SERIOUS" RESPONSE OUTPERFORMS A "TOUGH" ONE

GOP ATTACK: Millions of illegal immigrants are flooding the country - including known criminals, sex traffickers, drug traffickers, and gang members - bringing violent crime and drugs across the border and into our communities. Democrats' open borders, sanctuary city policies, and catch and release policies have led to a migrant crime wave. And Democrats are more worried about feeding and clothing illegals, while the rest of us struggle. I will secure our borders, end the chaos in our cities, and focus on Americans first.

DEM "TOUGH": The influx of asylum seekers is overwhelming places like New York and Chicago. New migrants are taking up resources and money our states can't afford. We don't have the infrastructure to deal with them. We need urgent help from community partners and government leaders to make sure these families have the tools to work and contribute to our communities. We also need the federal government to take action now to increase border security and stop the influx of migrants.

DEM "SERIOUS": We all deserve safety and security. I'm focused on solutions, not scare tactics. Let's secure our border by investing in new technology to detect fentanyl and drugs and prevent them from reaching our communities. Let's make sure there's a pathway to citizenship for families who've been here for years. Here at home, let's fully fund things proven to improve everyone's quality of life, like good schools, good paying jobs, health care, and affordable housing. Let's make life safer, more stable, and secure for all of us.

TOTAL

53%		51%	
41%		45%	

+6

SWING

34%		35%	
49%		56%	

+6

VOTERS OF COLOR

50%		43%	
42%		51%	

+16

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Source: GSG July 2024 Wisconsin survey commissioned by Vera Action

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**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS &
A LESSON FROM VIRGINIA:**
A bellwether for 2024's battleground states where
crime will likely dominate the state-level races.

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VIRGINIA 2023 AND CLOSE TO $25M ON CRIME ADS: TESTING TWO "TOUGH" ADS, ONE "SAFETY" AD

#1

GOP candidate touting more funding for police and 'tough on crime' approach

Republican Candidate Juan Pablo Segura

#2

Dem candidate touting support for police, police endorsements, and gun control measures

Democratic Candidate Nadarius Clark

#3

Dem candidate touting comprehensive approach and being 'serious about safety'

Mock ad for a Democratic candidate

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Source: HIT Strategies post-election December 2023 Virginia survey commissioned by Vera Action

"SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY" BEATS "TOUGH" OVERALL–AND MOTIVATES BLACK & YOUNG VOTERS

**AD # 1:
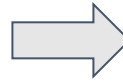GOP TOUGH**

**AD # 2:
DEM TOUGH**

**AD # 3:
DEM SAFETY**

	AD # 1	AD # 2	AD # 3
OVERALL	23%	26%	34%
BLACK VOTERS	6%	36%	47%
LATINO VOTERS	17%	37%	37%
WHITE VOTERS	27%	23%	31%
GEN Z VOTERS	13%	34%	37%
BOOMERS	25%	23%	27%
DEMOCRATIC VOTERS	7%	33%	54%
REPUBLICAN VOTERS	40%	18%	15%
INDEPENDENT VOTERS	21%	28%	29%

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

What <u>not</u> to say	What <u>to</u> say
Nothing/silence	**Actively communicate your ideas and solutions** for reducing crime and making Wisconsin safe
Tough on crime: Tougher sentences for violent criminals, keep dangerous criminals in jail not out on bail	**Emphasize comprehensive solutions** like fully funding items that create safe and thriving communities such as good schools, affordable housing, and a living wage
(ONLY) **Increased funding for police, more police**	**Increase funding for mental health and drug treatment**
Do the crime, do the time No early releases	**Spotlight accountability and prevention.** Bring accountability through programs to turn around the lives of those who have committed crimes
Attacking MAGA Republicans for being soft on crime for siding with **Jan 6 insurrectionists**	**Be serious about safety** and emphasize solutions

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