

SAFETY AND JUSTICE ON THE BALLOT IN 2024:

Takeaways of How Crime and
Immigration Impacted the Election

December 2024

VeraACTION

In this election cycle, voters voiced a
lost sense of security and stability.
If insecurity and instability is the ticking bomb,
fears about crime and immigration
are the wick to light the fuse.

METHODOLOGY: POST-2024 ELECTION NATIONAL POLL OF ACTUAL VOTERS ON CRIME & IMMIGRATION

Conducted October 31-November 5, 2024 via live phone and text-to-web.

1,500 registered voters who voted in the 2024 election, including voters who cast their vote on Election Day and before Election Day.

- 1,000 interviews nationally
- 200n oversample of Black voters
- 200n oversample of Hispanic voters
- 100n oversample of AAPI voters

Results reflect representative 2024 electorate.

Margin of error is +/- 3.1 percentage points.

TAKEAWAY # 1:

The GOP made this election about insecurity and instability—and Democrats were comparatively silent. “Migrant crime” and “open borders” supplanted “defund” as the go-to line of attack about crime.

THE 2024 "WILLIE HORTON" PLAYBOOK WAS ABOUT BLUE CITIES, MIGRANTS, FENTANYL, AND THE BORDER

THE GOP SPENT \$1B+ ON IMMIGRATION AND CRIME ADS.

@marcmolinaro · Sep 18
...
... border in which fentanyl is pouring into this
... position that we are currently in

- Sheriff Fred Akshar



5



PRESIDENT TRUMP

WILL STOP THE INVASION!

DEMOCRATS SPENT \$319M IN COMPARISON.

PAID FOR BY MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN INC. WHICH IS NOT CONSIDERED TO BE
ADVERTISING. NOT AUTHORIZED BY ANY CANDIDATE OR CANDIDATE'S COMMITTEE

"OVER 10 MILLION illegal border crossings."

-The Economist 1/24/24

“WILLIE HORTON” ATTACKS REMAIN THE GOP’S SIGNATURE MOVE—WITH MORE \$ SPENT EACH CYCLE

■ GOP ■ Democrats

2020 (crime only)



2022 (crime only)



2024 (crime + immigration)



Source: AdImpact

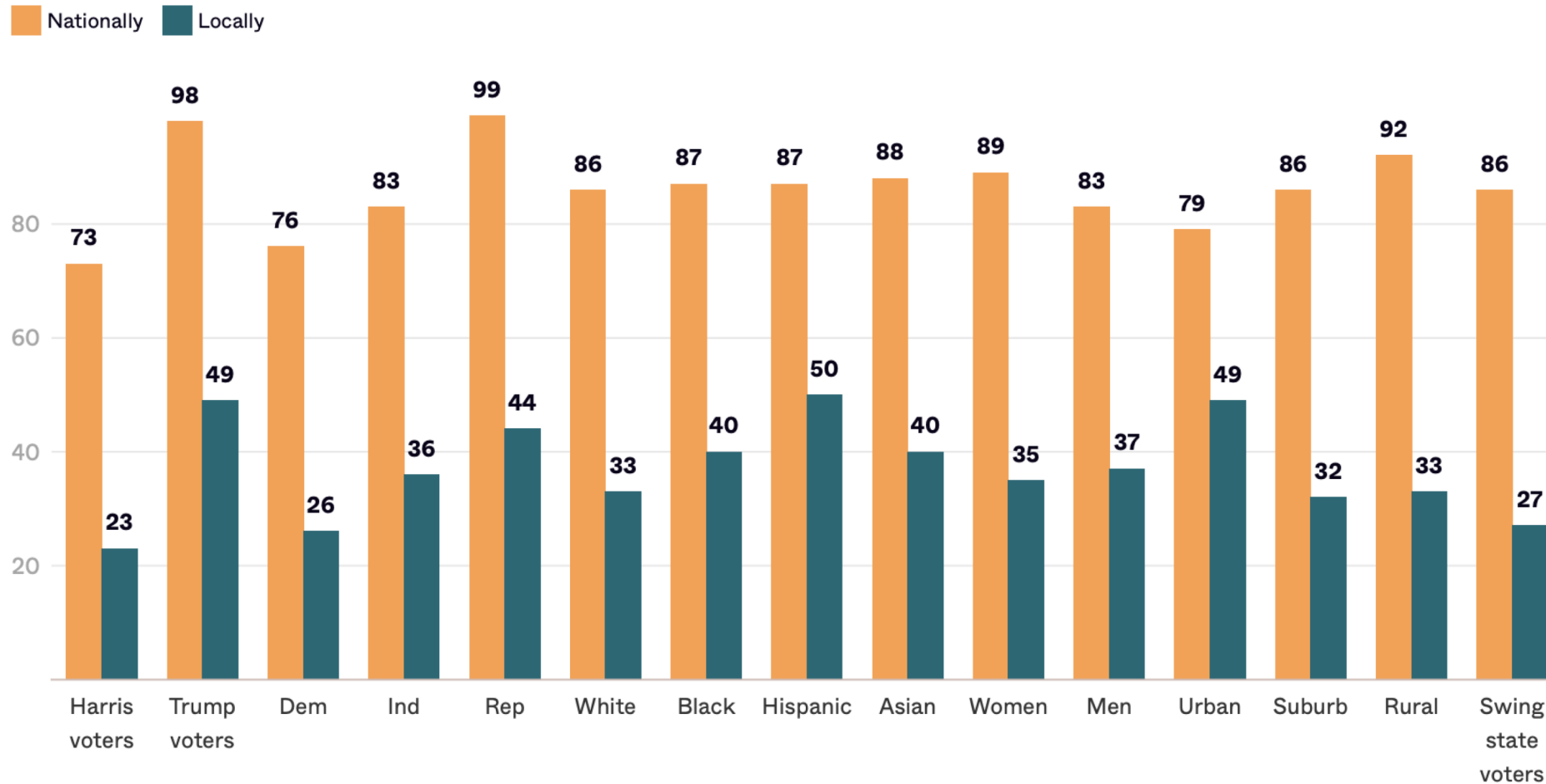


TAKEAWAY # 2:

Even though crime is not a top voting issue, it lurks right under the surface as a critical one for voters. When races are won and lost on the margins, inoculating against this line of attack is critical.

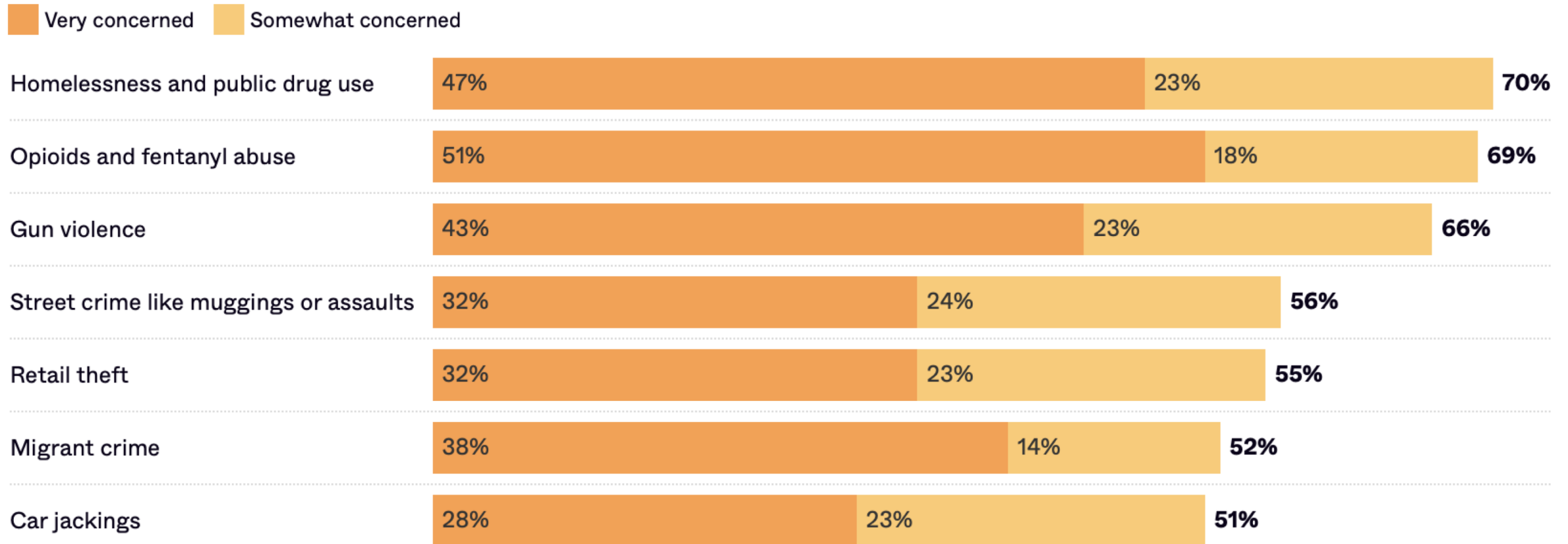
EVEN THOUGH CRIME IS NOT A TOP-TIER ISSUE, A MAJORITY OF VOTERS VIEW IT AS A SERIOUS ONE

Do you believe crime is a very serious or somewhat serious problem?



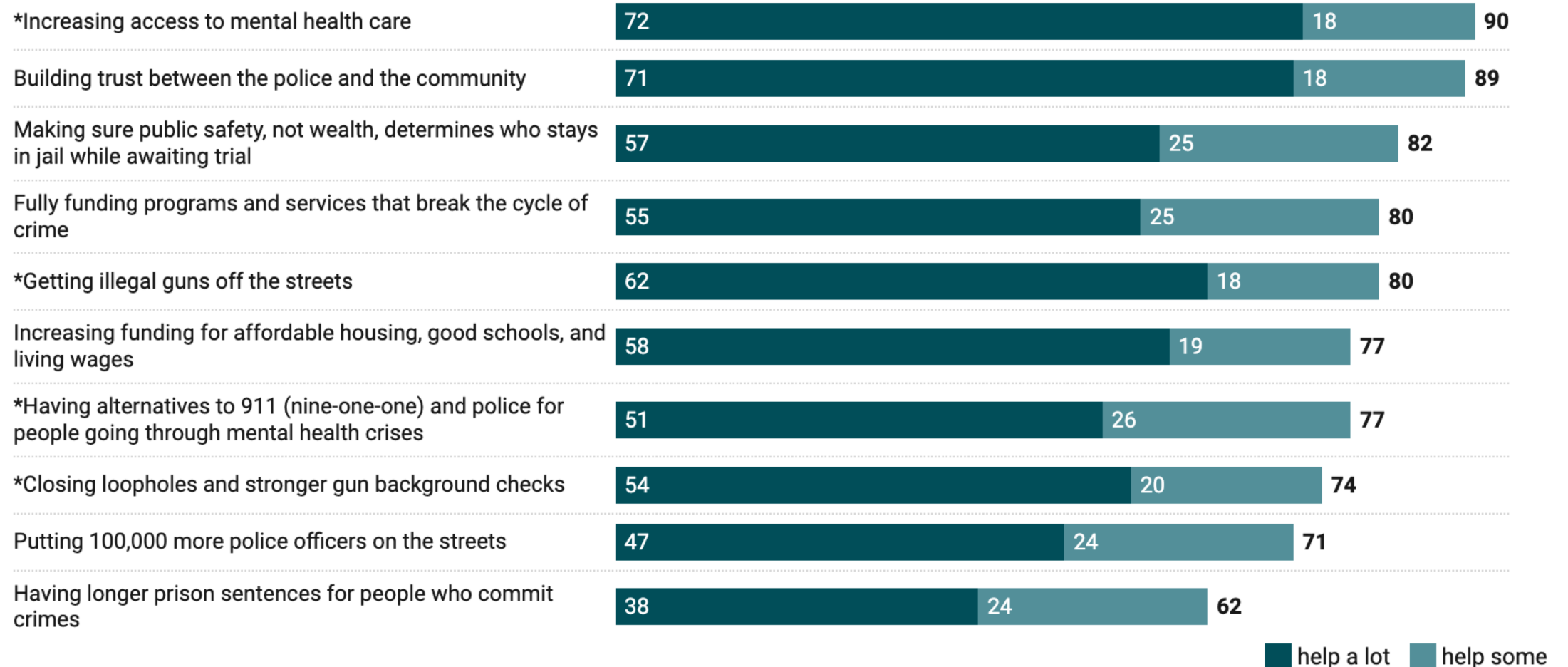
HOMELESSNESS AND OPEN AIR DRUG USE ARE BIGGER CONCERNS THAN “MIGRANT CRIME”

How concerned are you about each of the following types of crime impacting you?



WHEN ASKED ABOUT POLICY PROPOSALS ON CRIME, PREVENTION IS FAVORED OVER GETTING TOUGHER

How much do you believe the following proposals will help to reduce crime?



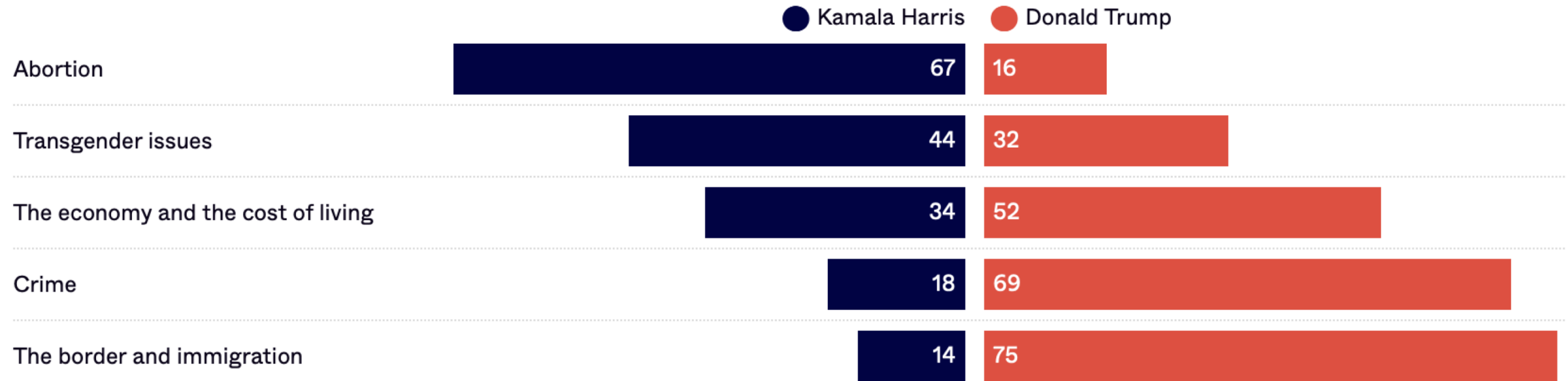
*Split 1/2 sample

TAKEAWAY # 3:

Trying to “out-tough” the opposition doesn’t work. Democrats need to create a values contrast to the GOP. Despite running a “tough-on-immigration-and-crime” campaign, VP Harris’s message failed to break through.

VOTERS HEARD MORE FROM TRUMP ON PRIORITY ISSUES—THE ECONOMY, CRIME, AND IMMIGRATION

Who did you hear more from on each of the following issues?



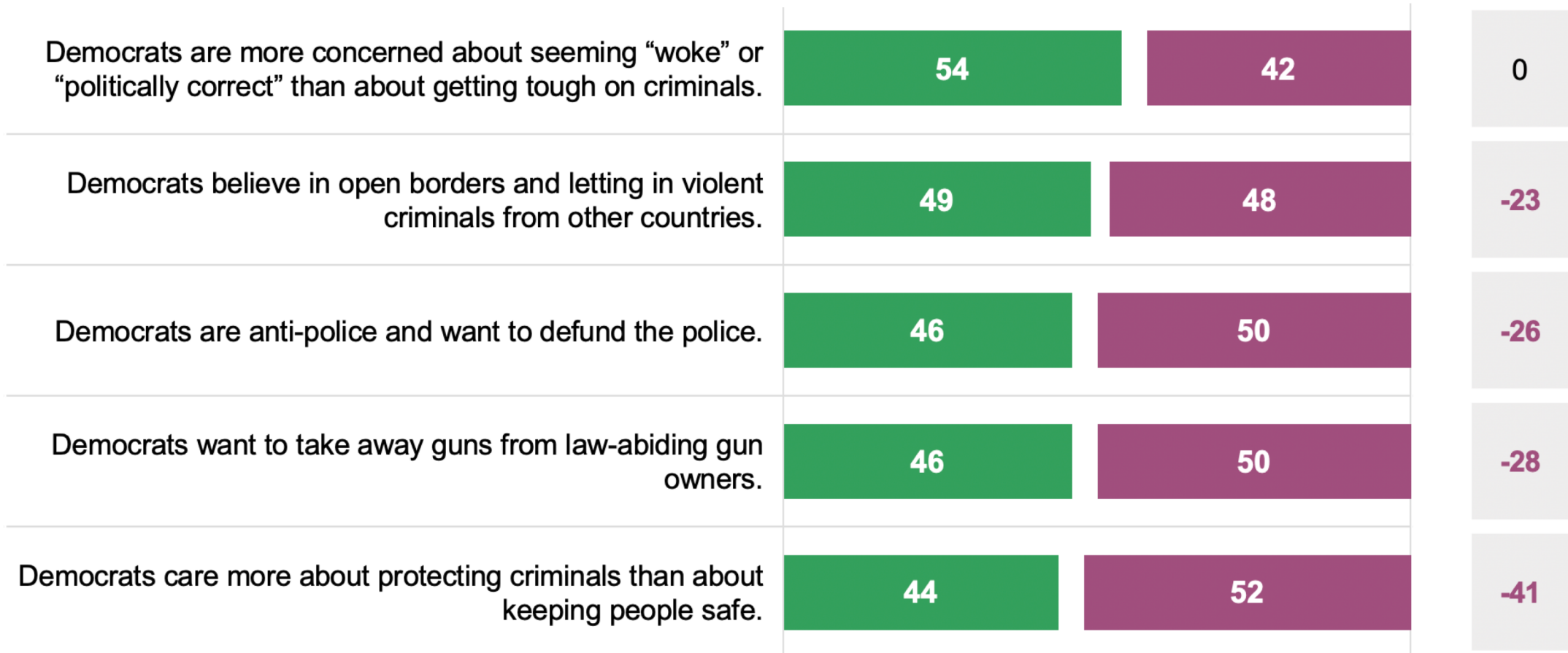
TAKEAWAY # 4:

Crime and immigration remain a real liability for Democratic candidates, but the liabilities are not one-sided. The GOP's liability is that voters perceive the party to be about scare tactics, not real solutions.

CRIME & IMMIGRATION WERE A LIABILITY FOR DEMOCRATS—BUT NOT INSURMOUNTABLE ONES

Do you think the following statements are mostly **true** or mostly **false**?

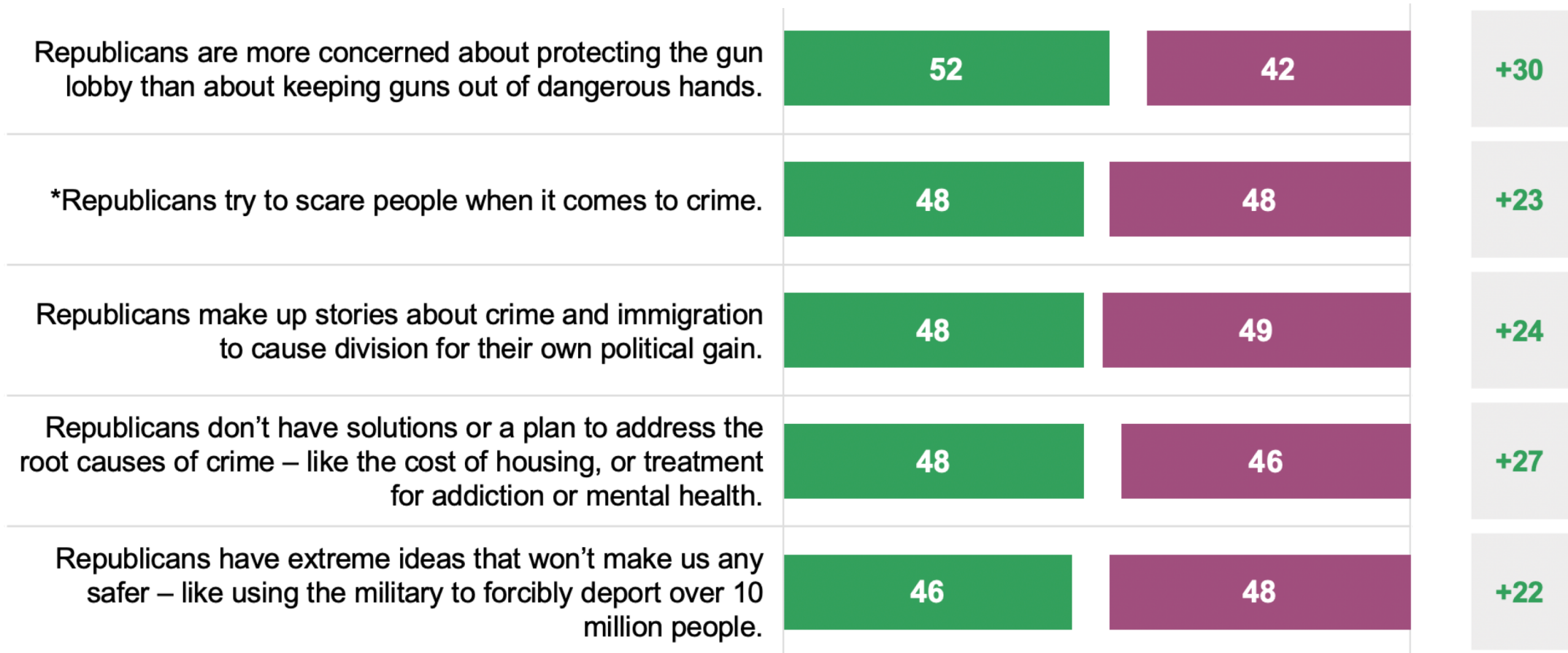
*True-False
Among Late
Deciders*



BUT THE GOP ALSO HAD REAL LIABILITIES THAT DEMOCRATS FAILED TO TAP INTO WITH VOTERS

Do you think the following statements are mostly **true** or mostly **false**?

*True-False
Among Late
Deciders*



TAKEAWAY # 5:

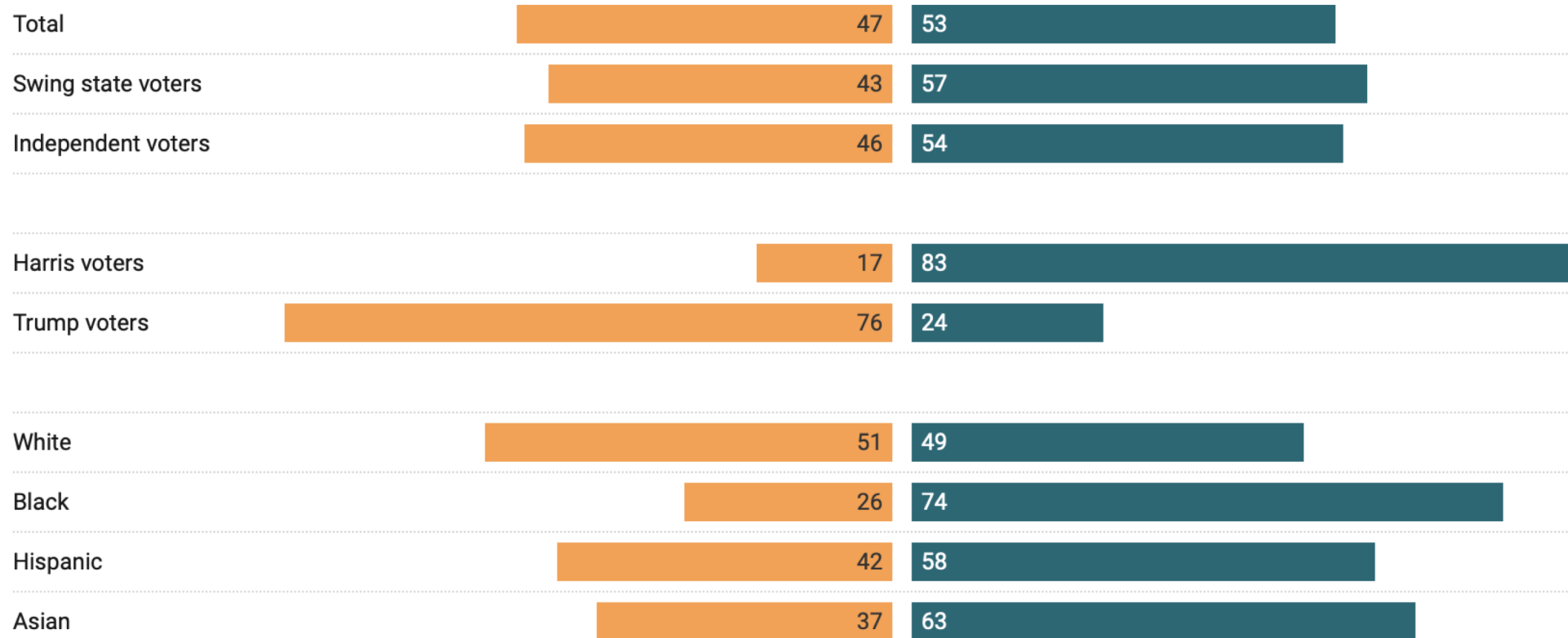
Democrats can counter “tough” attacks by getting off the opposition’s narrative playing field, creating a values contrast, and leading with solutions. Flip the frame to being “serious about safety.”

A MAJORITY OF 2024 VOTERS CHOSE A “SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY” APPROACH OVER “TOUGH ON CRIME”

Which of the following statements about crime do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?

Do more to get **tough on crime** – like having tougher sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep dangerous people in jail, and providing police more support and resources.

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 getting illegal guns off the street.



WE TESTED WHETHER VOTER PREFERENCE CHANGED WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE CANDIDATES...

BOTH CONDITIONS: Donald Trump says Kamala Harris has been soft on crime since day one. As San Francisco District Attorney, she let violent criminals go free who then murdered again. And now with the flood of illegal immigrants pouring into our country, the drug cartels are waging war on America. Kamala Harris always puts criminals first. Blood is on her hands, and America will be her next victim.

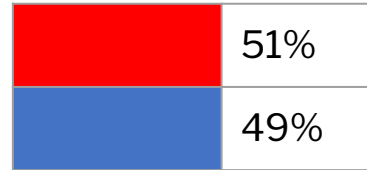
HARRIS “TOUGH ON CRIME”:

Kamala Harris has spent decades fighting violent crime. As a border state prosecutor, she took on drug cartels and jailed gang members for smuggling weapons and drugs across the border. As vice president, she backed the toughest border control bill in decades. And as president, she will hire thousands more border agents and police officers and crack down on fentanyl and human trafficking. Fixing the border is tough, and so is Kamala Harris.

HARRIS “SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY”:

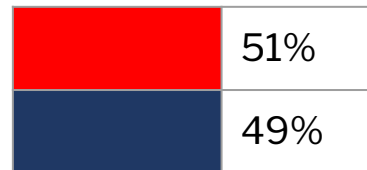
Nothing is more important than keeping you and your family safe. We all deserve leaders who are serious about safety. As Vice President, Kamala Harris invested in good schools, jobs, and treatment to break the cycle of crime and she supported the police to investigate and solve serious crimes. America's cities are safer as a result: shootings and homicides are down nationally by more than 11 percent. We're making progress, but there's still more to do. Kamala Harris stands for safety, accountability, and justice.

HEAD-TO-HEAD ATTACK V. DEM “TOUGH”



+2

HEAD-TO-HEAD ATTACK V. “SERIOUS”



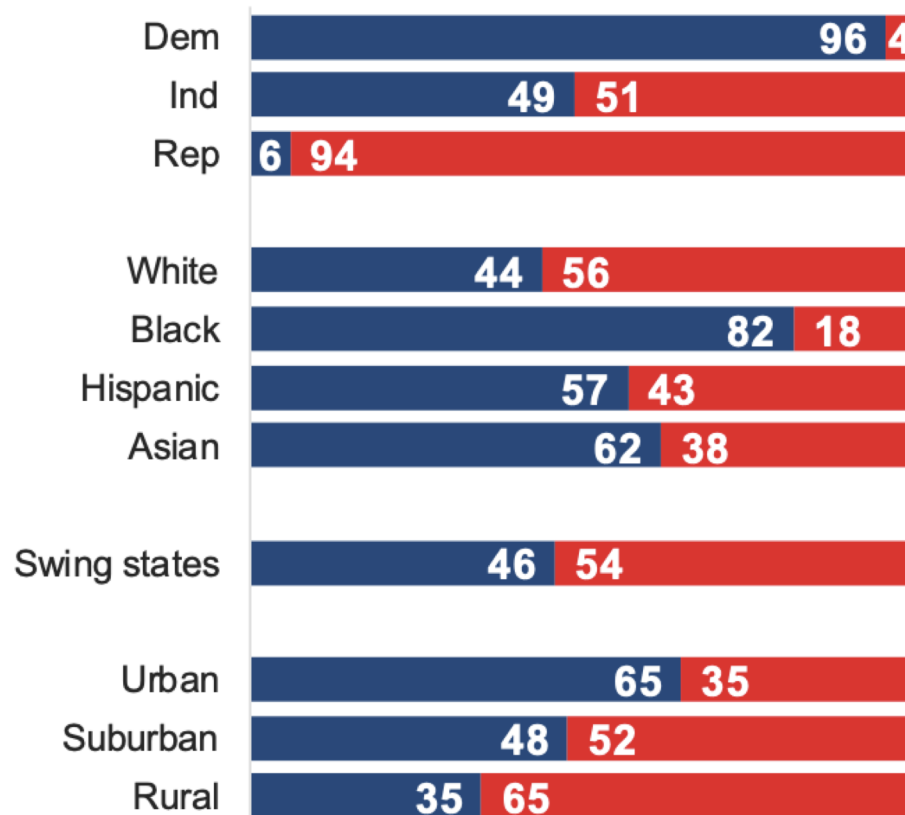
+2

... AND A “SERIOUS” APPROACH OUTPERFORMED A “TOUGH ON CRIME” ONE WITH KEY MOVEABLE VOTERS

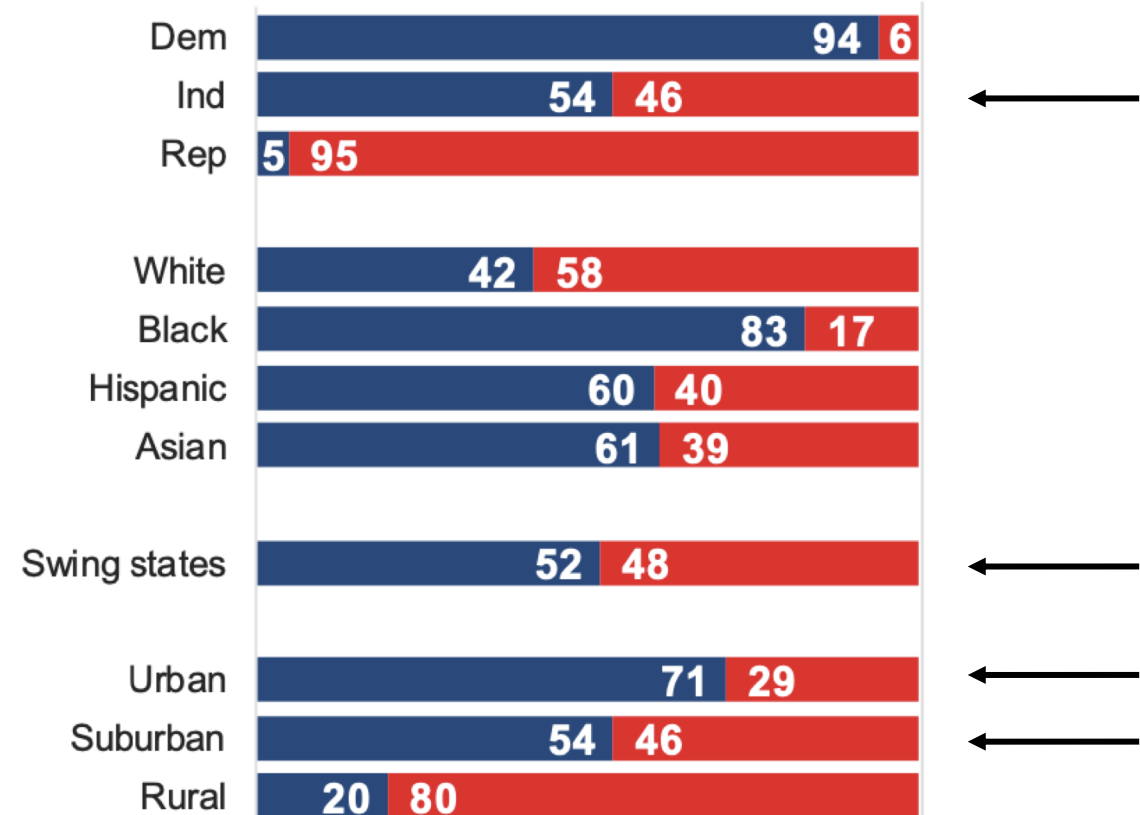
Which of the following statements about crime do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?

**Split ½ sample*

Harris Statement (Tough)* vs Trump Statement



Harris Statement (Serious)* vs Trump Statement



A FEW MORE NARRATIVE TIPS

1. Get off the opposition's narrative playing field and onto our own using the “values, villain, and vision” framework.

We do not win when we counter “tough” rhetoric by trying to “out-tough” the opposition. Turn the debate and get onto our own narrative turf by affirmatively messaging and inoculating against attacks using the “3 Vs.”

2. Lead with the shared values of safety, accountability, and justice.

Acknowledge the importance of safety and that we deserve an honest conversation based in solutions, not scare tactics, about what makes communities safe. Take back and redefine accountability. Everyone can walk through the safety door to get to accountability and justice.

3. Call out “tough on crime” as the villain and say “I’m about solutions, not scare tactics.”

Across the political spectrum, a majority don’t believe “tough on crime” is working. Name it as the empty scare tactic that it is. If it worked, we would be the safest country in the world.

4. Rely on empathy, not simply data, to persuade.

Countering falsely-held beliefs with empathy is more persuasive than contradicting with data. Arguing about crime statistics, for example, with legislators or the public is often not effective. Setting the record straight with journalists and media is, though.

5. Pivot to a vision by pointing to concrete solutions and things that work.

There is strong support for community-based solutions. Highlight specific programs and how they work, who they serve, and the impact they have. This is where the data is persuasive.

THANK YOU!



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