

Vera ACTION

**Taking back the narrative on safety,
accountability, and justice in New York City**

December 2024

Zeldin spent \$15 million on ads about crime—while Hochul spent next to nothing on the issue

NEW YORK

How blood-and-guts headlines propelled Republicans in New York

In New York, voters consistently ranked crime among their top concerns in polls, while voters nationally did not.

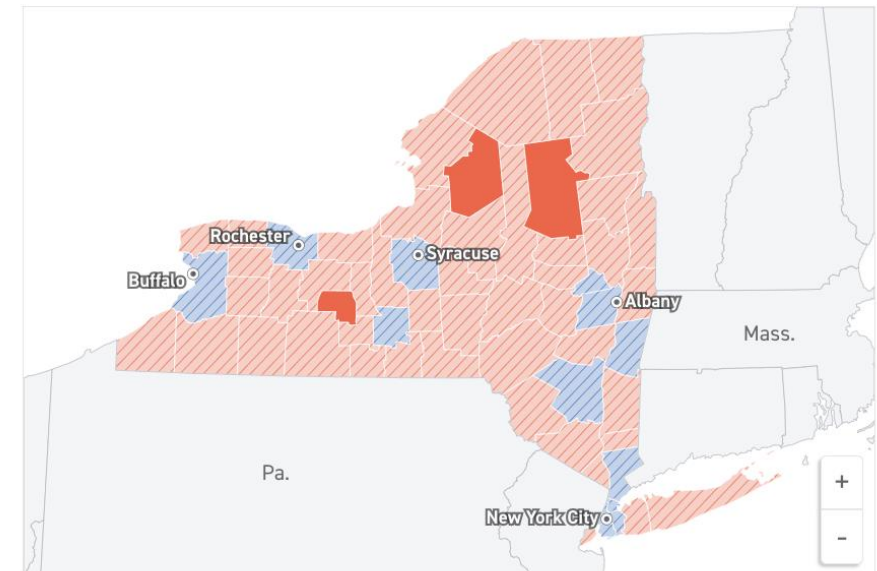


Election results: New York Governor

Last updated Jan. 12, 2023, 12:44 p.m. EST

Leading/Won

◆ Dems ◆ GOP



Candidate	Pct.
✓ Hochul* (D)	52.9%
◆ Zeldin (R)	47.1%

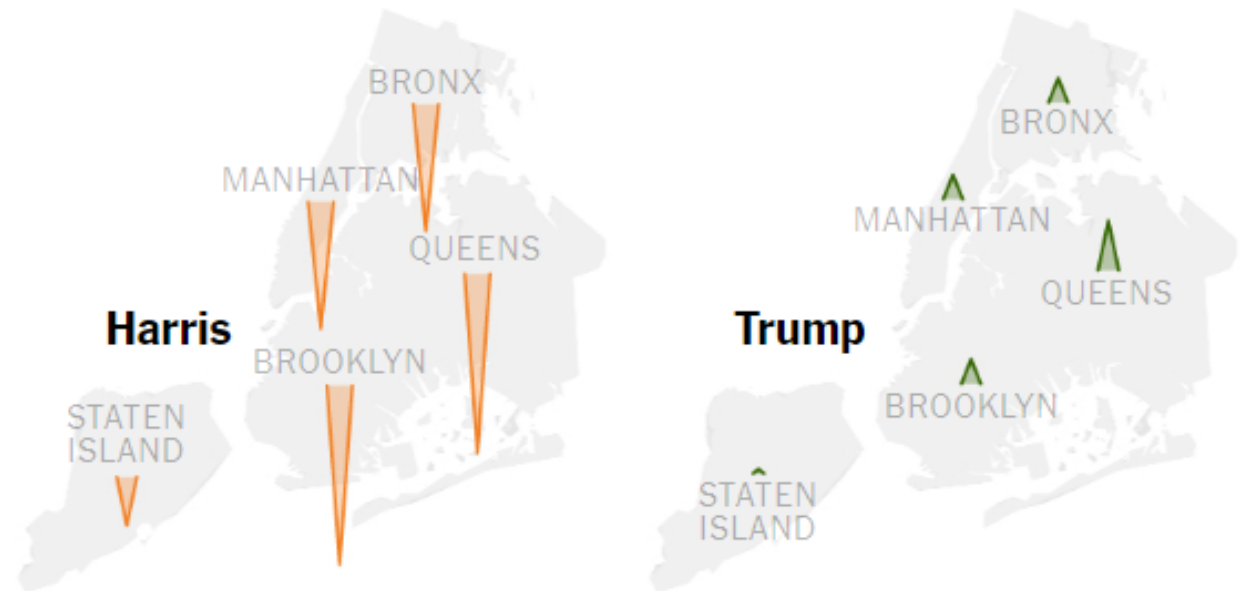
*Incumbent 97% in

NYC voters will stay home, or veer right, if candidates don't offer a contrasting vision for safety and justice

Trump Gained 95,000
Votes in New York City.
Democrats Lost Half a Million.

The New York Times

Where each candidate ▲▲▲ gained or ▼▼▼ lost votes compared with the party's 2020 candidate, by borough



Polling in this deck

2023-2024 statewide qualitative and quantitative research by Lake Research Partners and GBAO:

- February 2024 survey of 500 voters in the special election for NY-03 (+/-4.4%)
- November 2023 survey of 800 likely 2024 voters in NYS (+/-3.1%)
- August 2023 survey of 1,000 likely 2024 voters in NYS, with oversamples of Western NY, Long Island, the Hudson Valley, and NY-01, 11, 17, 19, and 22 (+/-3.0%)
- July 2023 focus groups of likely voters in Long Island and Hudson Valley

2022 statewide quantitative survey by David Binder Research:

- April 2022 survey of 600 registered voters in the New York City metro area, lower Hudson Valley, and Long Island (New York, Kings, Bronx, Richmond, Queens, Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Rockland, and Orange Counties) (+/-4.4%)

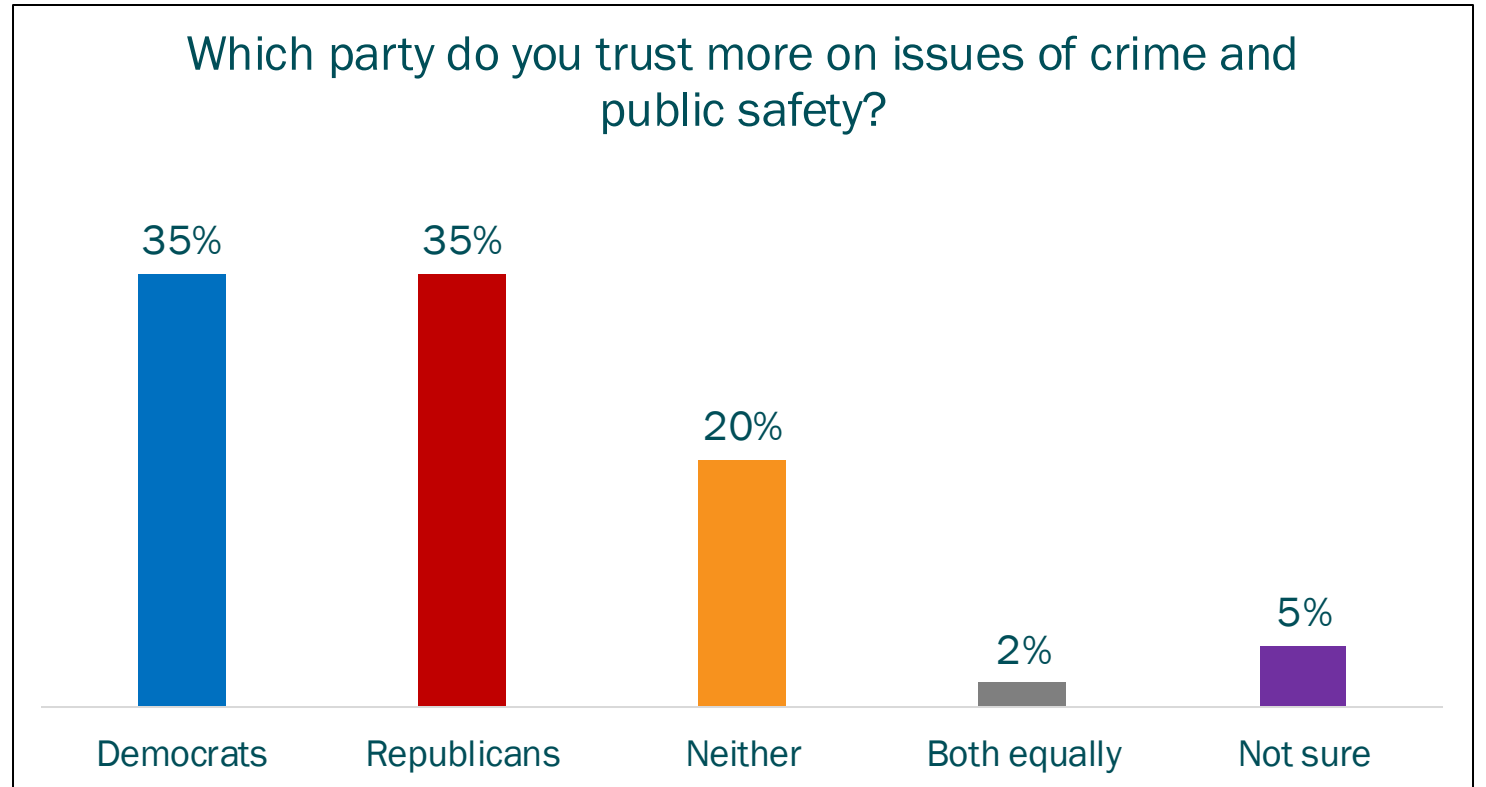
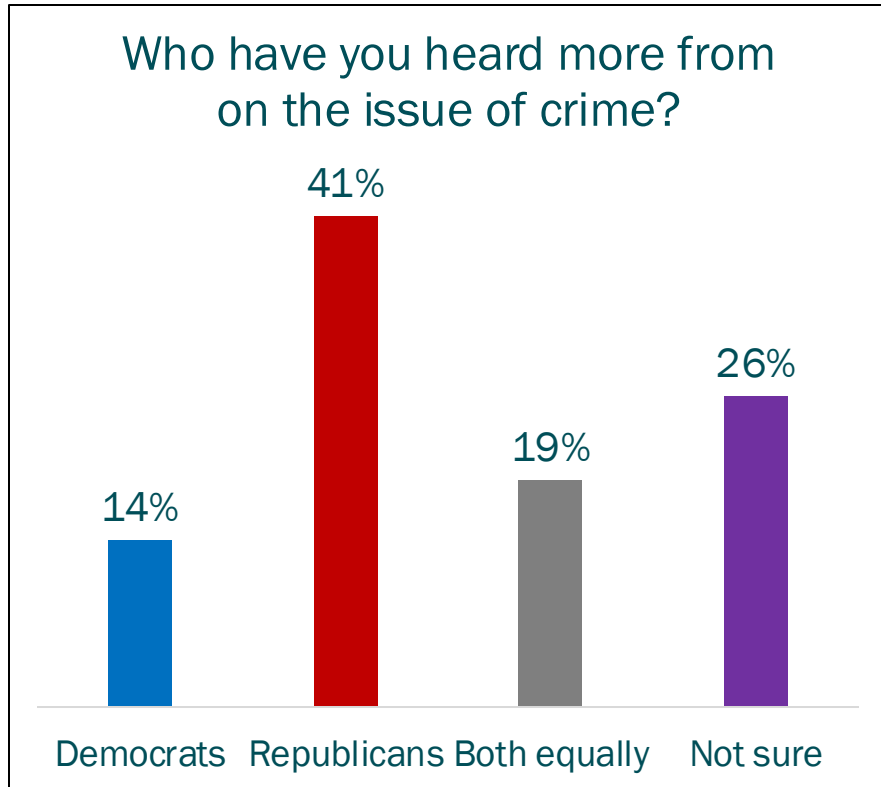
2024 national surveys by YouGov Blue and Perry Udem:

- May 2024 survey of 1,000 voters across the US to test different Democratic messaging frames about immigration (+/-3.0%)
- April 2024 survey of 1,000 voters across the US to test different Democratic messaging frames about crime (+/-3.5%)
- January 2024 survey of 2,771 voters across the US to test different Democratic messaging frames about crime (+/-2.9%)

Lesson 1.

The problem isn't that "tough on crime" wins. It's that voters aren't hearing an alternative.

NYC voters trust Republicans more on issues of crime and safety simply because they hear from them more



Democrats avoided talking about bail reform after passing it—if they had spoken up, we’d be in a different position

“Bail reform in New York ended cash bail for low-level misdemeanors and nonviolent felonies. **Before bail reform, our court system criminalized poverty**, creating a system where the wealthy were free to go because they could afford to pay bail and gain release, but if you were poor you would go to jail. There is a lot of misinformation about how bail reform works in New York. Many judges, police officers, prosecutors, and public defenders continue to support the bail reform laws because they know that **judges can and do still set bail and detain people facing serious and violent charges, and those who commit crime are still held accountable.**”

	Support pre-explanation	Support post-explanation
Overall	25%	44% (+19)
White	26%	42% (+16)
Black	24%	50% (+26)
Latinx	25%	47% (+22)
New York City	30%	52% (+22)
NYC suburbs	20%	42% (+22)
Western New York	28%	43% (+15)
Hudson Valley	21%	32% (+11)
Independents	13%	39% (+26)

Lesson 2.

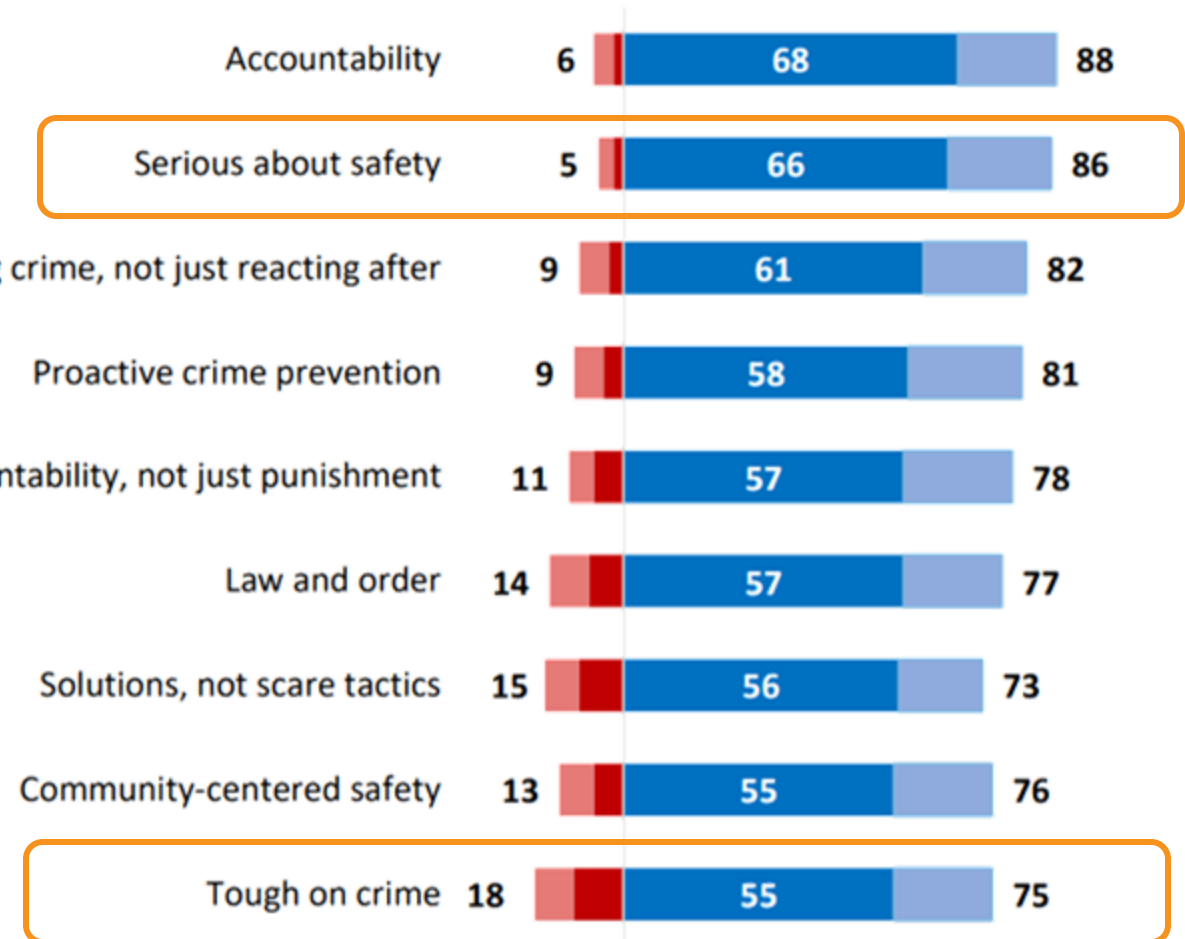
Flip the script from crime to safety by owning an affirmative message of “serious about safety.”

NYS voters favor an approach that is “serious about safety” over “law and order” or “tough on crime”

“How would you feel if your community took one of these approaches to public safety?”

■ Very Favorable ■ Somewhat Favorable
■ Very Unfavorable ■ Somewhat Unfavorable

Favorability of Public Safety Approach



Source: August 2023 Lake Research Partners survey commissioned by Vera Action

Responding to fearmongering with a "serious about safety" message outperforms "tough on crime"

GOP ATTACK:

I will make hard-working, law-abiding citizens the priority, and end the revolving door that releases violent criminals right back onto the very streets they committed their crimes on. I will make prosecutors do their jobs and enforce all the laws. I will fund the police and provide resources to rebuild the ranks of departments who have lost officers due to a lack of support and low morale. I will stand up to Democrats, who have allowed repeat criminals out of jail through bail reform and want to defund the police, and I will restore law and order in New York.

42/43%

TOUGH ON CRIME RESPONSE:

I am committed to keeping communities safe and reducing crime. I support giving police more funding so there are more police on the ground and in communities. I want to give police and prosecutors the tools to solve and prosecute homicides and other violent crimes. I support speedy processing of rape kits to help solve rape cases, and enforcing laws to protect women from domestic abusers. I will make sure repeat violent offenders and people committing crimes with guns do not get early release from prison. I will support strict penalties for convicted drug dealers to stop the flow of drugs into our communities.

45%

SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY RESPONSE:

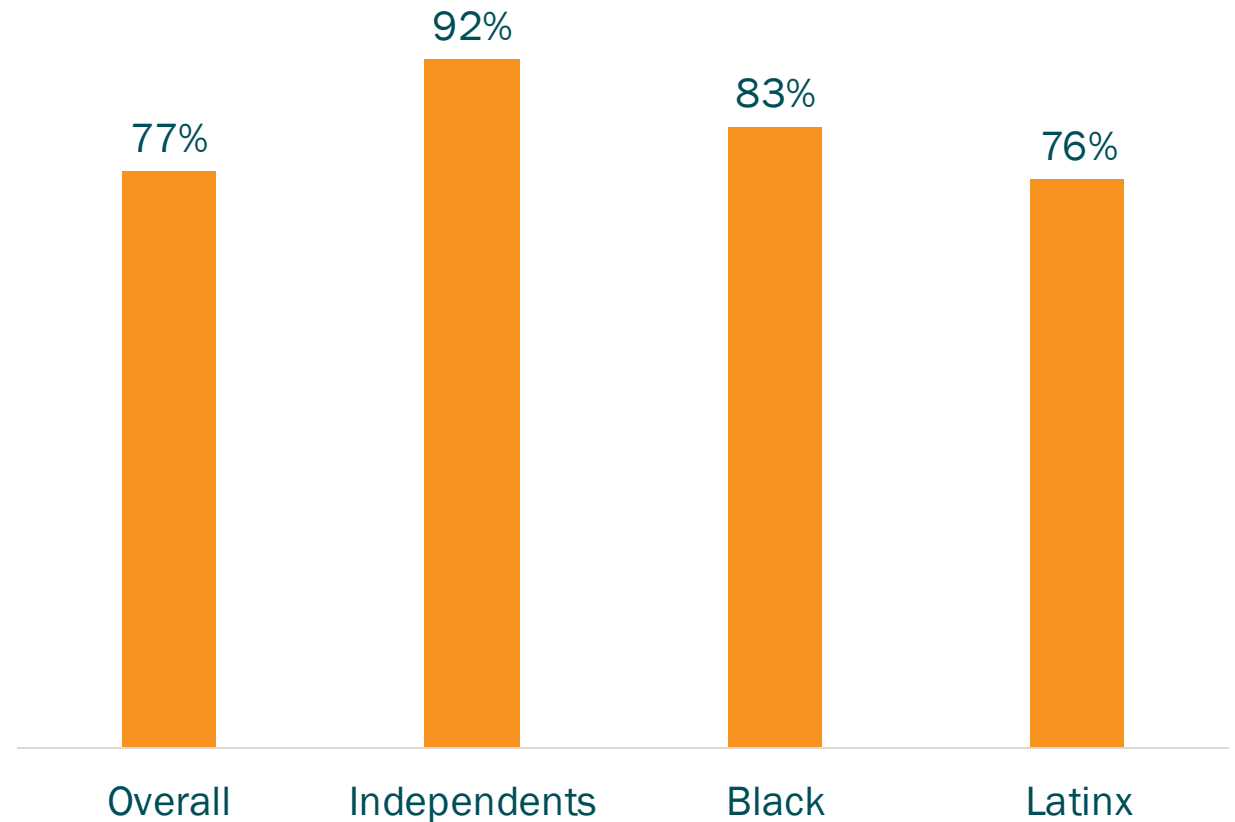
I stand for safety, accountability, and justice. I will make communities safer with real solutions that prevent crime before it happens by investing in good schools, affordable housing, treatment for mental health and drug addiction, and well-paying jobs. I will break the cycle of crime by holding people accountable when they violate the laws and build a just system that treats everyone fairly. I will support police who put their lives on the line everyday, while also holding them accountable if they abuse their power or break the law. I will get illegal guns off the street and focus police resources on solving the most serious cases.

47%

A "serious about safety" message wins with key voters who rank crime as a top priority

	"Serious about safety" vs. Republican	"Tough on crime" vs. Republican
Overall	47%	45%
Independents	31%	22%
Black	72%	49%
Latinx	62%	50%
New York City	54%	53%

"The issue of crime is important to my vote"

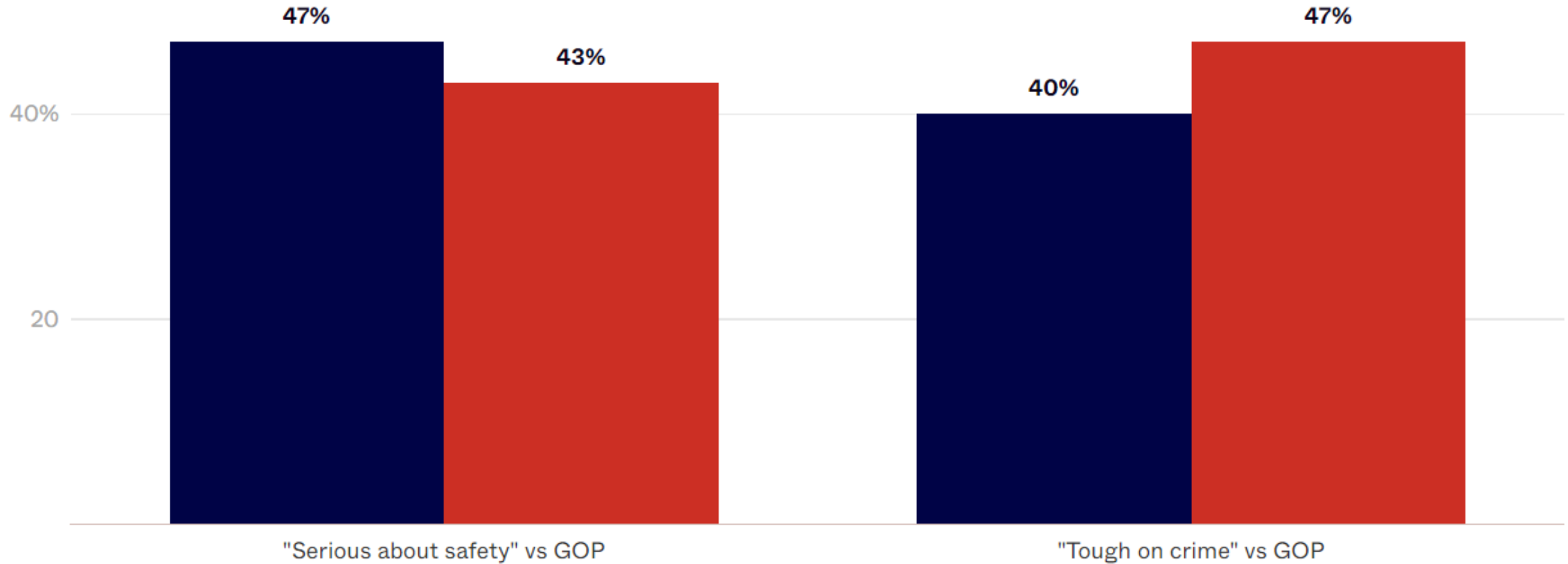


“Serious about safety” messaging speaks to the complex drivers NYC voters know cause crime

Which factors are most responsible for crime in New York?	
Insufficient treatment for mental health and addiction issues	48%
Increased poverty and homelessness	38%
Violent criminals being released from jail too early	31%
Bail reform and weak prosecution of existing laws	30%
Relying too much on policing and incarceration instead of crime prevention and rehabilitation	24%
Young people with not enough support and guidance	24%

Our national polling confirms the power of a “serious about safety” frame

Democrat GOP



What it means in practice to be “serious about safety”

- Lead with safety
- Talk about preventing and breaking cycles of crime
- Include immediate and long-term solutions
- Center accountability

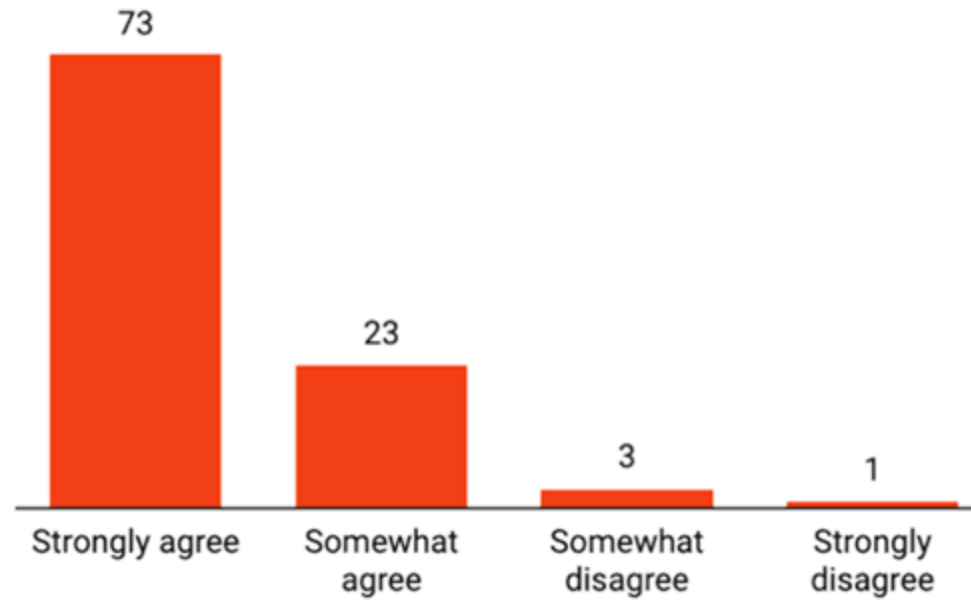
“I stand for safety, accountability, and justice. I will make communities safer with real solutions that prevent crime before it happens by investing in good schools, affordable housing, treatment for mental health and drug addiction, and well-paying jobs. I will break the cycle of crime by holding people accountable when they violate the laws and build a just system that treats everyone fairly. I will support police who put their lives on the line everyday, while also holding them accountable if they abuse their power or break the law. I will get illegal guns off the street and focus police resources on solving the most serious cases.”

What it means in practice to center accountability

Do you agree or disagree:

People who break the law should face consequences and be held accountable. Accountability is understanding the harm they've done, making amends, learning from their mistakes, and changing their behavior.

N = 1,396



Lesson 3.

“Serious about safety” counters the law-and-order fearmongering about the border, crime, and policing.

On immigration, voters want a message of “safety, security, and stability”

GOP ATTACK:

Millions of illegal immigrants are flooding the country – including known criminals, sex 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.

46%

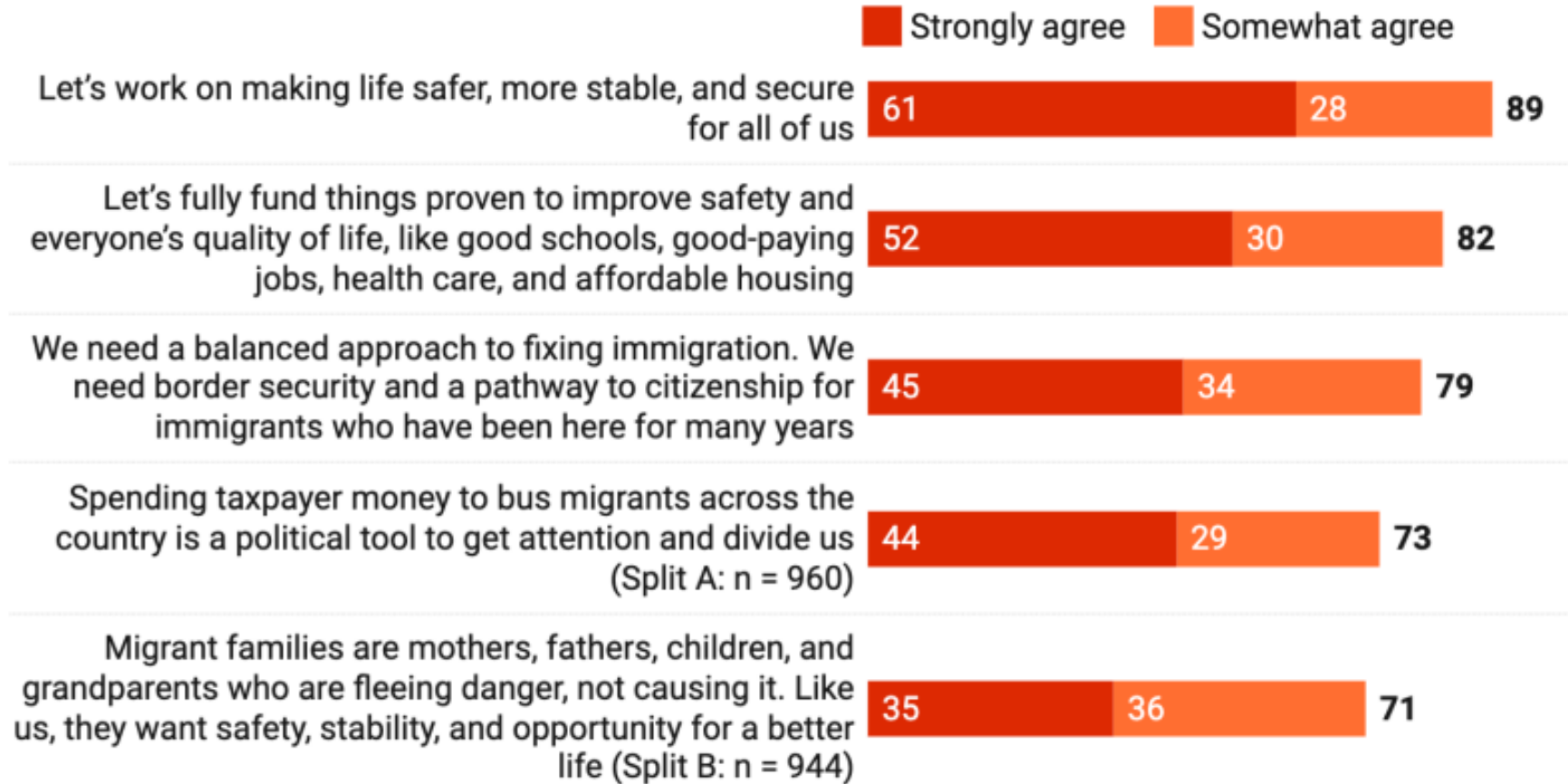
DEMOCRAT “SAFETY, STABILITY, SECURITY”:

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 have 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.

54%

Anchor your messaging with a consensus point—then proactively inoculate and go on offense

Anchor
Inoculate
Go on offense
Neutralize attacks



On retail theft, respond to attacks with solutions, not fact checking

GOP ATTACK:

We can thank woke prosecutors for letting American cities spiral out of control. People are scared to go into stores because of theft and looting. Hardworking employees and business owners are traumatized and scared to go to work. Organized retail crime is just happening brazenly. Evil is spreading across the country, with thieves taking whatever they want and prosecutors aren't doing a thing about it. In fact, woke prosecutors are against any charges or prosecutions for theft. There are no consequences and that's why criminals are so open, brazen, and violent with stealing. We've got to get tougher on crime. I'll start by making sure every thief is punished to the full extent of the law.

46/42%

RESPONSE FOCUSED ON FACT CHECKING:

My opponent wants to use scare tactics to rile people up to win votes. Look at the data. There is not a retail theft epidemic. We should do more to stop theft, but let's tell the truth about the problem and solutions. I will work with police to reduce theft so that our stores don't have to lock up basics like toothpaste and shampoo. Also, some people steal out of desperation and poverty because they're in survival mode. Throwing them in jail or charging them with huge fines will not change their behavior. It will just make them more desperate. My focus is on holding people accountable in ways that actually stop the cycle of crime - and make all of us safer.

54%

RESPONSE FOCUSED ON SAFETY:

My opponent wants to use scare tactics to rile people up to win votes. Here's what I can tell you. We all deserve to live in safe neighborhoods and shop at places in peace. I will work with police to take down organized theft so that our stores don't have to lock up basics like toothpaste and shampoo. Also, some people are stealing out of desperation and poverty because they're in survival mode. Throwing them in jail or charging them with huge fines will not change their behavior. It will just make them more desperate. My focus is on holding people accountable in ways that actually stop the cycle of crime - and make all of us safer.

58%

On policing, a support and accountability message wins, particularly when supported by nonpartisan messengers

CANDIDATE A ATTACK:

My opponent supports the radical left and defunding the police. Crime is at an all-time high, but the other candidate constantly criticizes the police, voices support for policies that stop the police from doing their jobs, and wants to allow repeat criminals out of jail through so-called “bail reform.” The other candidate is opposed by police unions because they want to take away resources from our brave officers and leave them defenseless in the line of duty. Our cities, like New York, are under siege by criminals because of anti-police candidates.

CANDIDATE B “SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY”:

We deserve real solutions to keep our communities safe. We are pouring billions of dollars into a public safety system that isn’t working. We need to get serious about safety with a new approach. We can support the police to do the difficult jobs we ask them to do, and also hold them accountable when they break the law. We can reduce crime by investing in community violence prevention, youth employment, mental health and drug treatment, and affordable housing, and by focusing police resources on the most serious cases.

	A (Republican)	B (Democrat)
Overall with partisan labels	45%	44%
Overall without partisan labels	27%	52%
White	29%	49%
Black	27%	62%
Latinx	24%	50%
New York City	23%	56%
NYC suburbs	35%	42%
Western New York	16%	57%
Hudson Valley	32%	54%
Independents	21%	47%

Lesson 4.

Don't do it alone—trusted messengers can reinforce your message.

NYC voters trust and want to hear from crime survivors and their families, first responders, and experts

Convincing messengers on issues of crime and public safety	
Survivors of violent crimes	46%
Formerly incarcerated people who now serve as violence prevention specialists	41%
First responders	34%
Social workers	33%
Teachers	32%
Criminal justice and public safety experts	28%
Former police officers	21%
Religious leaders	11%

Together with trusted messengers, step into the silence gap with a comprehensive "serious about safety" frame

Lead with safety

Talk about preventing and breaking cycles of crime

Include immediate and long-term solutions

Center accountability

For more information, please contact:

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