

WINNING THE NARRATIVE ON SAFETY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND JUSTICE

Takeaways from nationwide and battleground
polling on how to get out of the wilderness

May 2025

VeraACTION

POLITICAL CLIMATE HEADING INTO 2026

Republicans have a slight advantage in House battleground districts. But even in a tough environment, Democrats make up ground when they lean into safety and justice.

METHODOLOGY

Global Strategy Group conducted a live phone and text-to-web survey of **1,395 likely 2026 General Election voters in House Battleground districts** between April 1st and 7th, 2025.

This includes a base sample of 1,000 interviews and oversamples of the following groups:

- 130 African American likely voters resulting in a total of 211 African American interviews
- 105 Hispanic likely voters resulting in a total of 223 Hispanic interviews
- 160 AAPI likely voters resulting in a total of 198 AAPI interviews

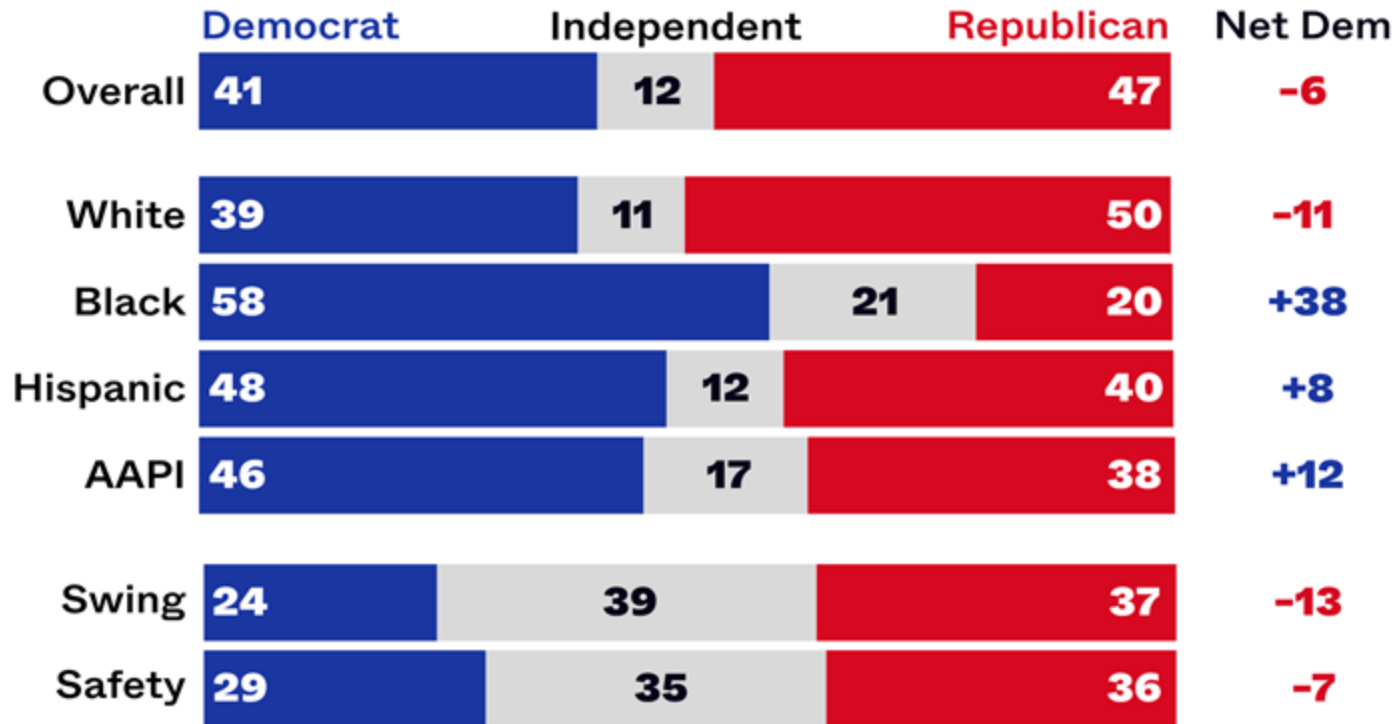
Margin of error

The margin of error at the 95% confidence level is +/- 3.1%.

The margin of error on sub-samples is greater.

DESPITE THE ADVANTAGE THAT GOP CANDIDATES HAVE IN HOUSE BATTLEGROUND DISTRICTS...

Party Self-Identification



... WHEN DEMOCRATS LEAN INTO SAFETY, THEY PULL AHEAD OR DRAW EVEN WITH EVERY VOTING BLOC

[Prioritize Safety] Right now, too many of us are struggling to afford basic necessities like groceries and prescription drugs. But Republicans are doing nothing to lower costs or find solutions to make our communities safer. We need leaders who will prioritize investing in good schools, affordable housing, and preventing crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and by getting illegal guns off the street.

[GOP Attack] America's greatest comeback is just getting started. But Democrats and the radical left are standing in the way. They are more concerned about liberal elites and pushing woke ideas. After years of out-of-control inflation driven by Democrats' reckless government spending, we are finally putting our house in order by cutting waste and fraud, getting tough on crime, and delivering on the promises made to the American people.



TAKEAWAY # 1:

Democrats have a unique opportunity to win over the 20% of the electorate that are “safety and justice” voters. While most align with Democrats on public safety, they don’t see the party as caring about the issue—or them.

HEARING MORE FROM THE GOP THAN DEMOCRATS ON CRIME/IMMIGRATION WON OVER SWING VOTERS

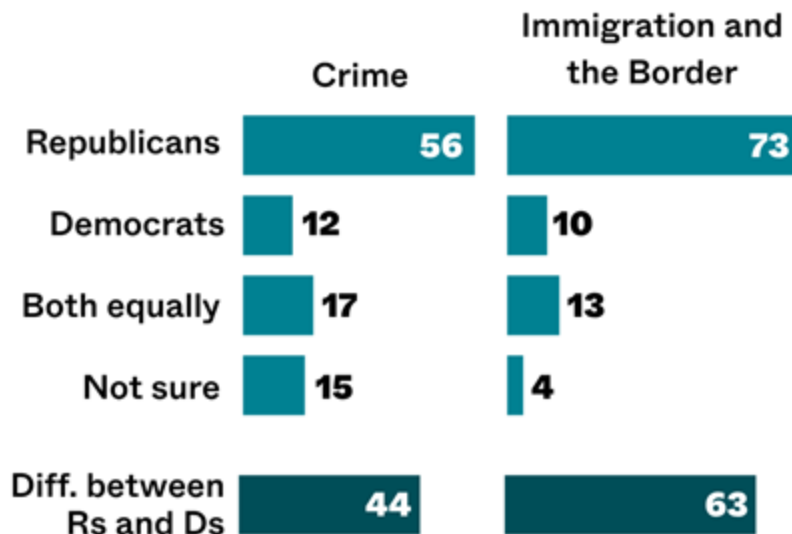
Among key subgroups who voted for Trump in 2024 after voting for Clinton or Biden in the last two presidential elections, the Democrats' relative silence on crime and GOP messaging dominance contributed to a rightward shift.

GOP advantage was a result of 3 perceptions:

- Republicans care about you
- Democrats don't care about you
- Republicans have solutions

These perceptions were more predictive of presidential vote choice than anything else.

In the campaigns this year, who did you hear more from on the issue of -----?



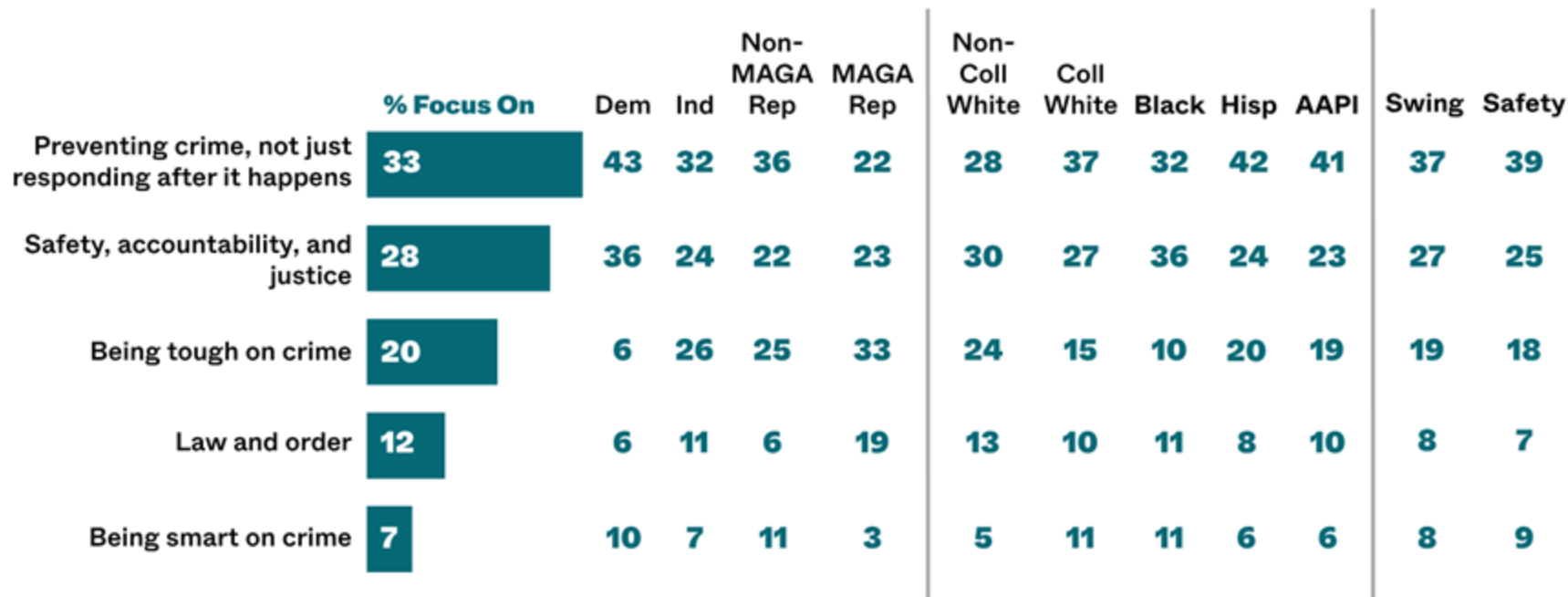
“SAFETY AND JUSTICE” VOTERS ARE KEY ELECTION TARGETS IN BATTLEGROUND SEATS

“Safety and justice” voters make up 20 percent of the electorate in House battlegrounds:

- “Safety and justice” voters are not bought into tough-on-crime rhetoric and a **compelling message on safety and justice** could sway their vote choice.
- Compared to the average electorate, “safety and justice” voters are more likely to be **independent, non-college educated**, live in an **urban or suburban** area, and are **voters of color** (AAPI, Black, or Latino).
- “Safety and justice” voters **overlap significantly with traditional swing voters**—half of swing voters are “safety and justice” voters, and 85% of “safety and justice” voters are also swing voters.
- They tend to favor **comprehensive approaches** proven to create safer communities, including **increasing access to mental health care** and investing in **education**.

“SAFETY AND JUSTICE” VOTERS ARE NOT ALONE IN WANTING A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO SAFETY

When it comes to public safety, which do you want your elected officials to focus on?



TAKEAWAY # 2:

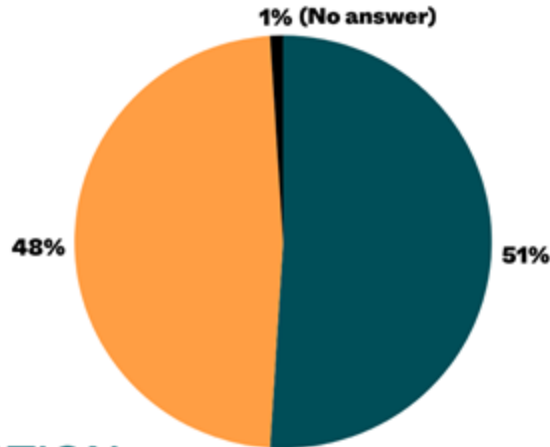
Voters favor a “serious about safety” approach over a tough-on-crime one—even when asked about specific policy proposals and their likely impact on improving community safety.

SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY PULLS JUST AHEAD IN HOUSE BATTLEGROUND DISTRICTS, STRONGER NATIONALLY

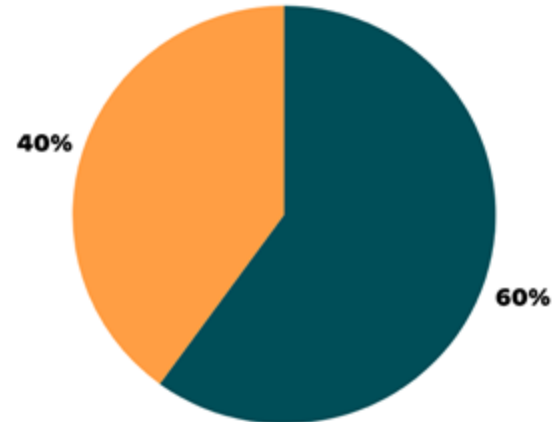
● We should fully fund things that are proven to create safe communities—like good schools, jobs, and affordable housing—and help prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and by getting illegal guns off the street.

● We should 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 with more support and resources.

House Battleground Districts



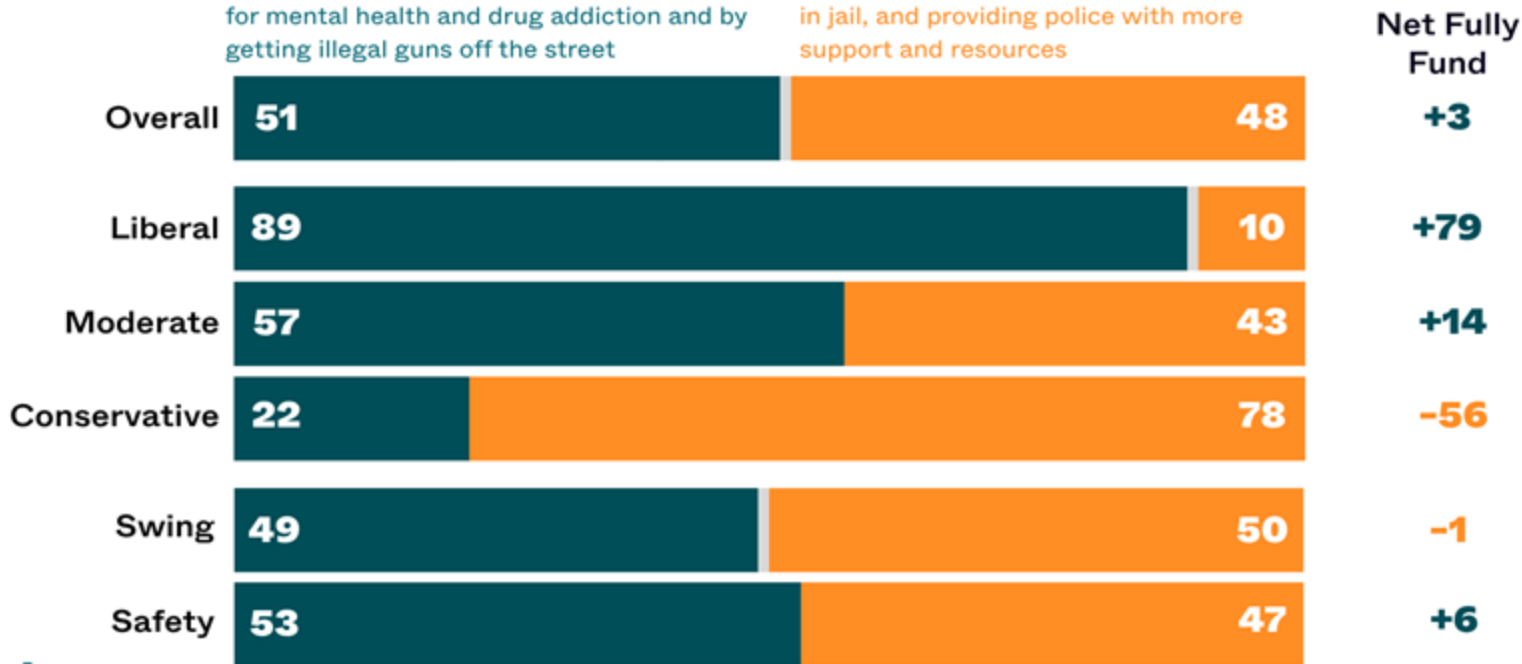
National



A “SERIOUS” APPROACH PULLS AHEAD OR DRAWS EVEN WITH ALMOST ALL BATTLEGROUND VOTERS

We should 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 by getting illegal guns off the street

We should 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 with more support and resources



TAKEAWAY # 3:

In 2024, while Republicans went on the attack on crime, Democrats either remained silent or responded by trying to “out-tough” the opposition—and both responses failed.

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

THE GOP SPENT \$1.3B ON IMMIGRATION AND CRIME ADS.

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



PRESIDENT TRUMP

WILL STOP THE INVOCATION



DEMOCRATS SPENT \$319M IN COMPARISON.

PAID FOR BY MAKE AM
ADVERTISING. NOT AUTHORIZED BY ANY CANDIDATE OR CANDIDATE'S COMMITTEE

OVER 10 MILLION illegal border crossings."
-The Economist 1/24/24

IN 2024, GOP OUTSPENT DEMOCRATS ON CRIME & IMMIGRATION—JUST AS IN THE PREVIOUS 2 CYCLES

● Republicans ● Democrats

2020 (crime only) **\$103M** \$38M

2022 (crime only) **\$230M** \$168M

2024 (crime + immigration)

\$1B

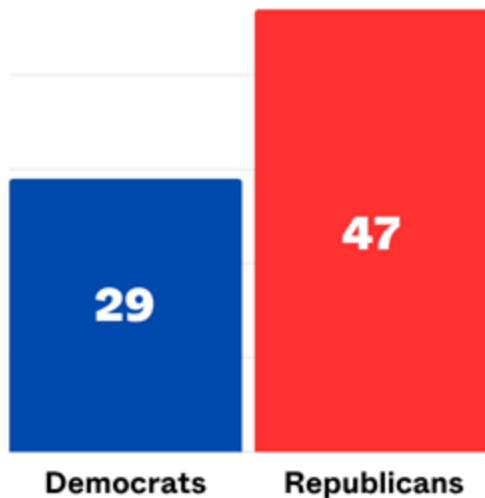
\$319M



DESPITE GOING TOUGH ON CRIME, THE VOLUME GAP ONLY WIDENED LEADING UP TO THE ELECTION

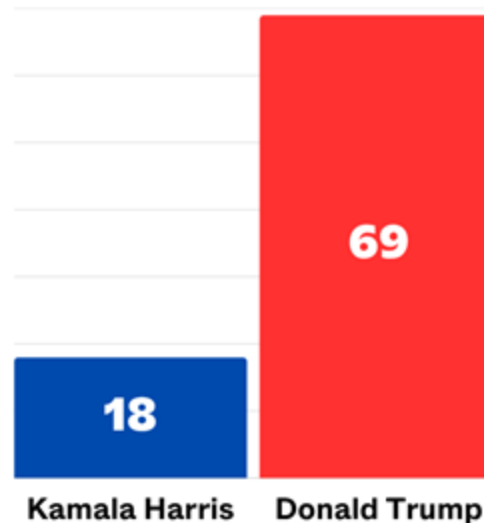
May 2024

Who do you hear more from on issues of crime, Democrats or Republicans?



November 2024

Which candidate do you hear more from on the issue of crime?



THE PROBLEM IS THAT BATTLEGROUND VOTERS NEED TO HEAR DEMOCRATS OWN THESE

Are Democrats or Republicans more likely to support the following proposals? - Republican Advantage

| | Dem | Equal | Rep | Overall | Dem | Ind | Non-MAGA Rep | MAGA Rep | Swing | Safety |
|---|-----|-------|-----|---------|-----|-----|--------------|----------|-------|--------|
| Provide real solutions to make communities safer | 36 | 22 | 42 | -6 | +74 | -22 | -17 | -84 | -9 | -6 |
| Make life safer, more stable, and secure for us all | 34 | 22 | 44 | -10 | +71 | -23 | -37 | -87 | -17 | -12 |
| Prevent crime instead of just responding after it happen | 34 | 22 | 44 | -10 | +62 | -21 | -30 | -80 | -13 | -10 |
| Be serious about safety, accountability, and justice | 32 | 18 | 50 | -18 | +60 | -32 | -57 | -90 | -31 | -31 |
| Take action against broken systems that haven't made us any safer | 31 | 19 | 50 | -19 | +57 | -39 | -47 | -90 | -32 | -32 |
| Build relationships between police and the communities they serve | 30 | 25 | 45 | -15 | +50 | -21 | -30 | -80 | -20 | -16 |

TAKEAWAY # 4:

Voters across the political spectrum want to hear about solutions to make communities safe, promote accountability, and deliver justice. Only MAGA voters reject these policies—and they won't vote for Democrats anyway.

EVEN A “PURPLE” HOUSE BATTLEGROUND ELECTORATE BELIEVES IN “SAFETY AND JUSTICE”

Impact of proposals on community safety

| | % A Lot Safer | Dem | Ind | Non-MAGA Rep | MAGA Rep | White | Black | Hisp | AAPI | Swing | Safety |
|---|---------------|-----|-----|--------------|----------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|--------|
| Increasing access to mental health care | 63 | 80 | 62 | 56 | 45 | 62 | 72 | 65 | 64 | 64 | 63 |
| Getting illegal guns off the streets | 61 | 76 | 50 | 57 | 49 | 60 | 73 | 63 | 65 | 55 | 56 |
| Building trust between police and the communities they serve | 59 | 58 | 59 | 55 | 60 | 57 | 66 | 69 | 69 | 60 | 58 |
| Improving schools and programs for young people | 58 | 75 | 51 | 45 | 46 | 54 | 75 | 74 | 71 | 56 | 55 |
| Closing loopholes in gun laws and stronger background checks | 52 | 81 | 43 | 43 | 25 | 49 | 73 | 62 | 56 | 47 | 49 |
| Sending trained professionals when people are experience a mental health crisis | 52 | 72 | 48 | 50 | 30 | 48 | 70 | 61 | 56 | 50 | 46 |
| Putting more police officers on the streets | 50 | 31 | 42 | 48 | 72 | 49 | 46 | 55 | 51 | 40 | 38 |
| Mandating longer sentences for people who commit crimes | 48 | 28 | 50 | 48 | 68 | 46 | 44 | 55 | 52 | 42 | 45 |

“SAFETY AND JUSTICE” OUTPERFORMS OTHER MESSAGES—INCLUDING THE GOP “TOUGH” ONE

How convincing is this profile as a reason to vote for [CANDIDATE] for U.S. Congress?

[DEM STANDARD] Democrat Chris Thompson understands the cost of rent, groceries, and utilities is too high. So, here's what he will do about it. He will lower housing costs by building more homes and cracking down on landlords who are charging too much. He will lower food and grocery bills by going after price gougers who are keeping the cost of everyday goods too high. And he will reform the tax code to reward work, not wealth, so that families keep their hard-earned money instead of lining the pockets of millionaires...

Total % Convincing:
Overall Swing Safety

[WITHOUT SAFETY] ...Thompson also supports protecting reproductive rights and voting rights, raising the minimum wage, strengthening Social Security and Medicare, and making sure that every person is treated with respect and given a fair shot.

56 52 41

[WITH SAFETY] ...Thompson will invest in 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 by getting illegal guns off the street.

58 51 56

[SAFETY DEMOCRAT] Democrat Chris Thompson believes people who break the law should be held accountable and that everyone deserves to live in safe communities. But between the rising cost of rent, groceries, and utilities, concerns about crime, and a bad economy, too many are struggling, and many families are being left behind. It's time to get serious about safety, accountability, and justice. Thompson will invest in 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 by getting illegal guns off the street.

64 65 69

[REPUBLICAN] Republican Tim Clark is fighting for America's new Golden Age by cutting taxes, slashing government waste, unleashing domestic energy, and restoring law and order. While crime in Democrat-led cities has gotten out of control, Clark and his fellow Republicans are working to eliminate sanctuary cities, fire rogue prosecutors who are letting dangerous criminals walk the streets and are fighting Democrat politicians who are trying to defund local police. Putting Americans first will always be Tim Clark's top priority.

58 59 56

TAKEAWAY # 5:

On immigration, Democrats hold an advantage when talking about safety, stability, and security for everyone—they fall behind when they parrot GOP-lite rhetoric and go “tough” on the border.

THE VALUES OF SAFETY, SECURITY, AND STABILITY BEAT AN “OPEN BORDER/MIGRANT CRIME” ATTACK

Here are statements from two different candidates. Which candidate is more in line with your own views, even if neither is quite right?

REPUBLICAN: 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.

46%

DEMOCRAT: 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.

54%

BUILDING THE SAFETY AND JUSTICE NARRATIVE

Values:

Proactively talk about safety, accountability, and justice—early and often. Leaning into these values helps to overcome the trust and volume gap with voters who do not believe Democrats care about crime or immigration.

Villain:

Chip away at the Republican advantage on crime and immigration by driving home that they are focused on the wrong priorities. Call out the attack by saying “I’m here for solutions, not scare tactics,” and that the GOP is trying to distract and divide us instead of offering real solutions.

Vision:

Own the policies that make improve quality of life for all voters—like good jobs, affordable housing, increasing access to mental health care, and getting illegal guns off the street. Be concrete and share examples of success.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Visit Vera Action's resource library:

<https://veraaction.org/messaging-research-and-polling-library/>

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