

# **WINNING THE NARRATIVE ON SAFETY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND JUSTICE IN HOUSE BATTLEGROUND DISTRICTS:**

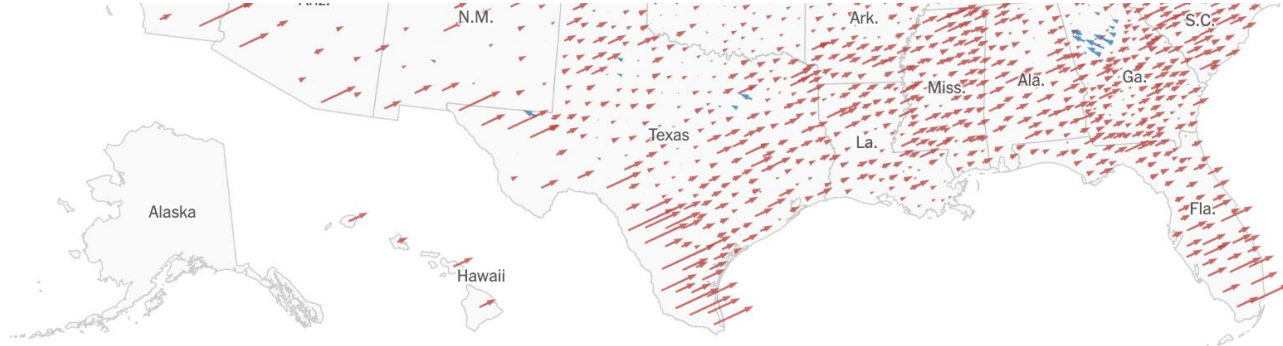
Messaging takeaways from nationwide and  
battleground district polling

May 2025

**Vera**ACTION

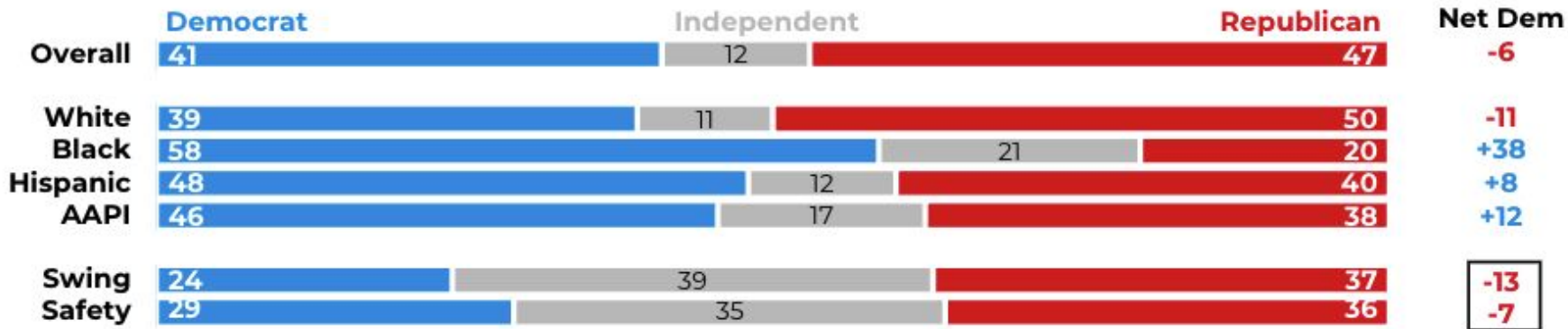


As the GOP spent \$1B+ on crime and immigration attacks, Harris ran as a “tough-on-crime-and-immigration” candidate—yet failed to win over voters.



# DESPITE THE ADVANTAGE THAT REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES HAVE WITH BATTLEGROUND VOTERS...

## Party Self-Identification



# ... GOP CANDIDATES ARE VULNERABLE ON CRIME WHEN OPPONENTS LEAN INTO SAFETY AND JUSTICE

Which do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right in your opinion?

Read to half

**[SPLIT A – GOP AT FAULT]** Right now, too many of us are struggling to afford basic necessities like groceries and prescription drugs. But Republicans in charge are making things worse by cutting health care, education, and critical local services, and by giving tax cuts to billionaire donors like Elon Musk. We should be investing in good schools, affordable housing, and crime prevention by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and by getting illegal guns off the street.

Read to half

**[SPLIT B – WRONG PRIORITIES]** 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.

Read to all

**[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:

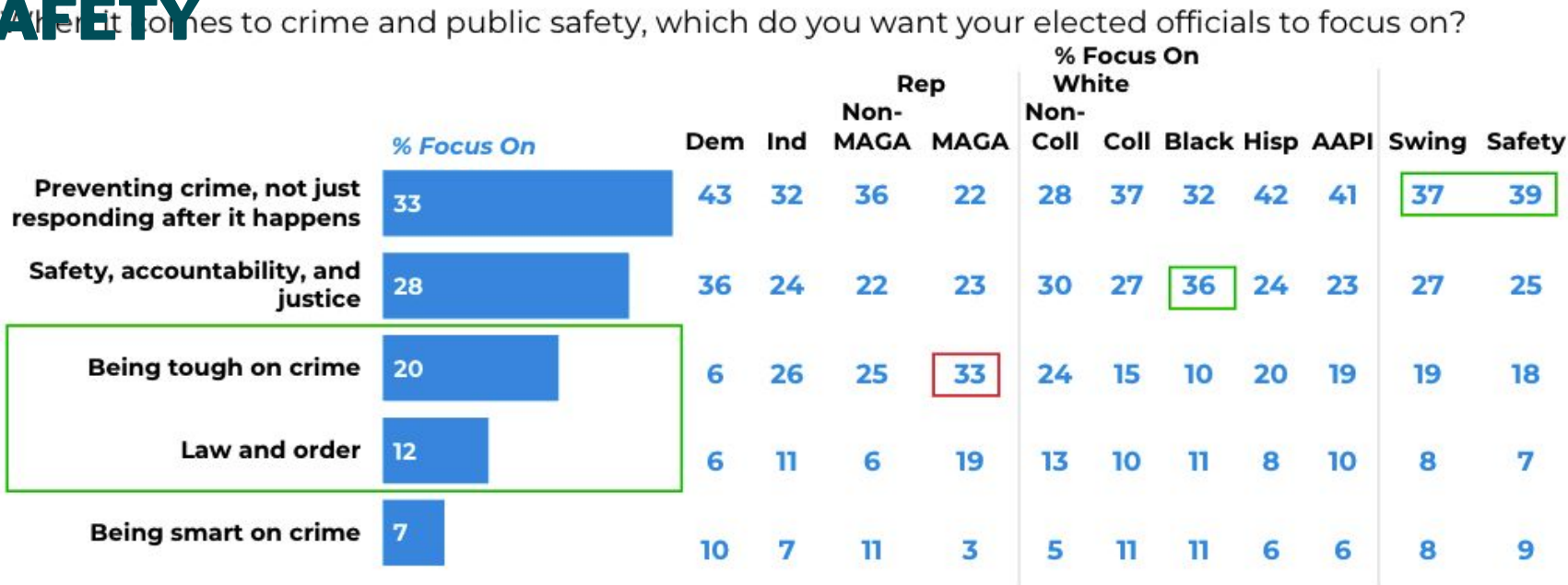
“Safety and justice” voters are a bloc that is less partisan and more likely to vote for a candidate—from either party—based on their platform. These voters are up for the taking.

# **“SAFETY AND JUSTICE” VOTERS ARE KEY TARGETS IN HOUSE BATTLEGROUND DISTRICTS**

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

- Compared to the average electorate, they 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). They overlap significantly with traditional swing voters.
- They favor funding things proven to prevent crime and create safe communities (53%) over “tough” approaches (47%).
- When it comes to crime, they are most concerned about opioids and fentanyl (56% very concerned), homelessness and public drug use (53%), and gun violence (43%).
- They believe increasing access to mental health care (63%), getting illegal guns off the street (56%), and building trust between police and the community (58%) will make communities a lot safer. Only 38% say “putting more police officers on the street” will make communities a lot safer.

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



- A plurality of voters (44%) say Republicans are more likely to support “preventing crime, not just responding after it happens,” compared to 34% of voters who say the same for Democrats.
- Half of voters (50%) say Republicans are more likely to support “safety, accountability, and justice,” compared to 32% who say the same for Democrats.

## TAKEAWAY # 2:

By remaining silent or responding by trying to “out-tough” the opposition when under attack on crime and immigration, Democrats miss out on winning over “safety and justice” voters.



# 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  
position that we are currently in



PRESIDENT TRUMP

WILL STOP THE INVOCATION

DEMOCRATS SPENT

\$319M IN COMPARISON.

PAID FOR BY MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN  
ADVERTISING. NOT AUTHORIZED BY ANY CANDIDATE OR CANDIDATE'S COMMITTEE



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

# GOP OUTSPENT DEMOCRATS ON CRIME AND IMMIGRATION—JUST AS IN THE LAST 3 CYCLES

■ GOP ■ Democrats

2020 (crime only)

\$103M

\$38M

2022 (crime only)

\$230M

\$168M

2024 (crime + immigration)

\$1B

\$319M

Source: AdImpact

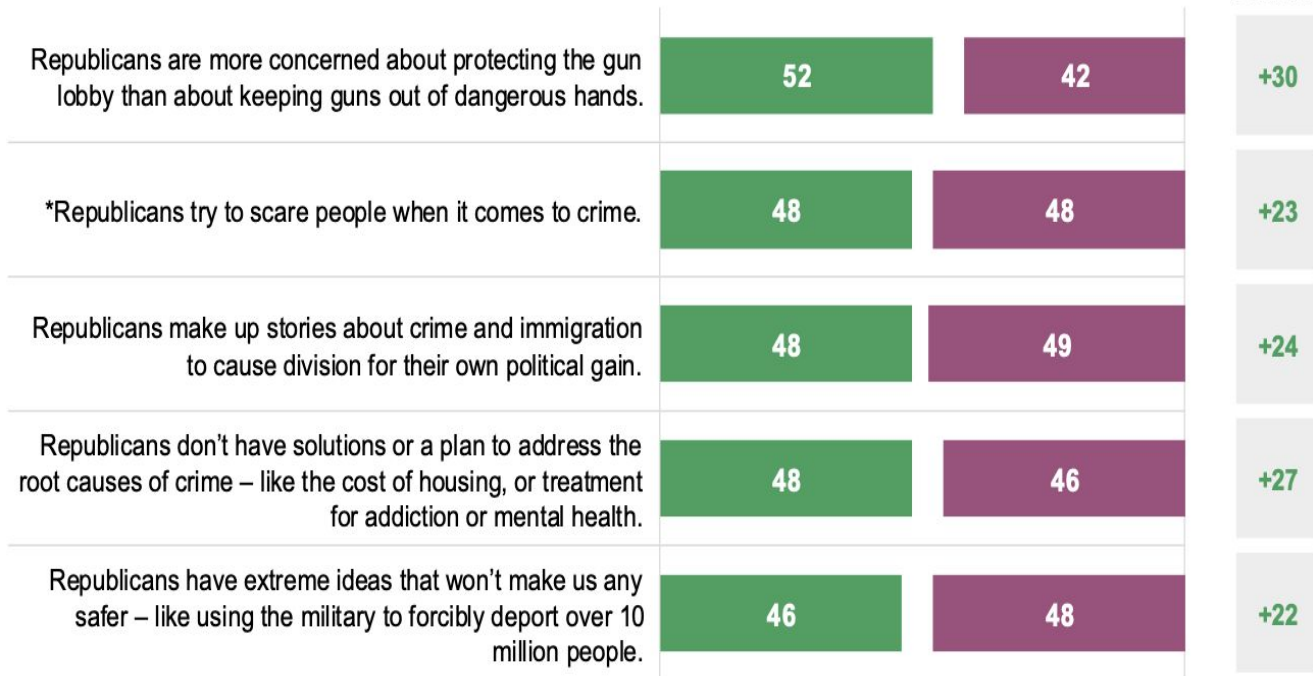


# IN 2024, DEMOCRATS COULD HAVE WON OVER SWING VOTERS BY DRAWING A CONTRAST ON CRIME

## GOP Party Critiques

Do you think this is *mostly true* or *mostly false*?

True-False  
Among Late  
Deciders



\*Combined split

Source: GBAO Post-2024 Election commissioned by Vera Action, November 2024

### TAKEAWAY # 3:

In 2026 House battleground districts, voters *want* to see “safety and justice” policies from candidates—and would be (pleasantly) surprised to hear about them from Democrats.

# EVEN IN AN UNFAVORABLE POLITICAL CLIMATE, A “SAFETY AND JUSTICE” MESSAGE DRAWS EVEN

**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

**Net Fully Fund**

Overall

51

48

+3

Democrats

88

12

+76

Independents

41

58

-17

Non-MAGA Republicans

43

57

-14

MAGA Republicans

16

84

-68

Swing

49

50

-1

Safety Target

53

47

+6



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

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

	Democrats	Equal	Republicans	Overall	Net Dem More Likely Rep					
					Dem	Ind	Non-MAGA	MAGA	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 all of us	34	22	44	-10	+71	-23	-37	-87	-17	-12
Prevent crime, instead of just responding after it happens	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 the broken systems that haven't made us any safer	31	19	50	-19	+57	-39	-47	-90	-32	-32
Build relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve	30	25	45	-15	+50	-21	-30	-80	-20	-16

## TAKEAWAY # 4:

Even with partisan affiliation attached, a “safety and justice” Democratic candidate moves skeptical swing and “safety” voters by 10+ percentage points.

# “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?

	<b>[DEM STANDARD]</b> 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...	<b>% Total Convincing</b>		
		<b>Overall</b>	<b>Swing</b>	<b>Safety</b>
<b>Read to half</b>	<b>[WITHOUT SAFETY]</b> ...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.	<b>56</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>41</b>
	<b>[WITH SAFETY]</b> ...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.	<b>58</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Read to half</b>	<b>[SAFETY DEMOCRAT]</b> 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.	<b>64</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Read to all</b>	<b>[REPUBLICAN]</b> 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.	<b>58</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>56</b>



## **TAKEAWAY # 5:**

“Safety and justice” policy proposals are popular with all voters—except MAGA voters who will not vote for Democrats, regardless of what they say.

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

## Impact of Proposals on Community Safety

Impact of Proposals on Community Safety						% A Lot Safer							
				Rep									
	% A Lot Safer	Dem	Ind	Non-MAGA	MAGA	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 requiring stronger gun background checks	52	81	43	43	25	49	73	62	56	47	49		
Sending trained health professionals when people are experiencing 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		
Paying people a living wage	49	74	44	38	28	45	70	61	62	47	46		
Mandating longer sentences for people who commit crimes	48	28	50	48	68	46	44	55	52	42	45		
Increasing affordable housing	42	60	38	38	24	38	63	54	56	42	42		

# 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 obvious—instead of offering real solutions to make us safer, they are employing “tough-on-crime” rhetoric to divide and distract us. Don’t take the bait.

## 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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