

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

Polling for the Virginia gubernatorial on how to win the narrative on safety, accountability, and justice and inoculate against “soft-on-crime-and-the-border” attacks

June 2025

VeraACTION

VIRGINIA 2023 AND CLOSE TO \$25M SPENT ON CRIME ADS: TESTING 2 “TOUGH” & 1 “SAFETY” AD

#1

GOP candidate touting more funding for police and “tough-on-crime” approach



**Republican Candidate
Juan Pablo Segura**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VN6zlrXQszE>

#2

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



**Democratic Candidate
Nadarius Clark**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgDu65zyvT0>

#3

Dem candidate touting comprehensive approach and being “serious about safety”



**Mock ad for a Democratic
candidate**

<https://vimeo.com/912348236/4be896715d?share=copy>

“SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY” BEATS “TOUGH ON CRIME” OVERALL—AND MOTIVATES BLACK & YOUNG VOTERS

Even if none is exactly right, which of these ads is most aligned with your views?

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%



SAFETY
ACCOUNTABILITY
JUSTICE

WHAT DEMOCRATS
STAND FOR

<https://vimeo.com/912348236/4be896715d?share=copy>

METHODOLOGY

Voters

Global Strategy Group conducted a live phone and text-to-web survey of **1,075 likely 2025 Virginia General Election voters** between May 1st and 7th, 2025.

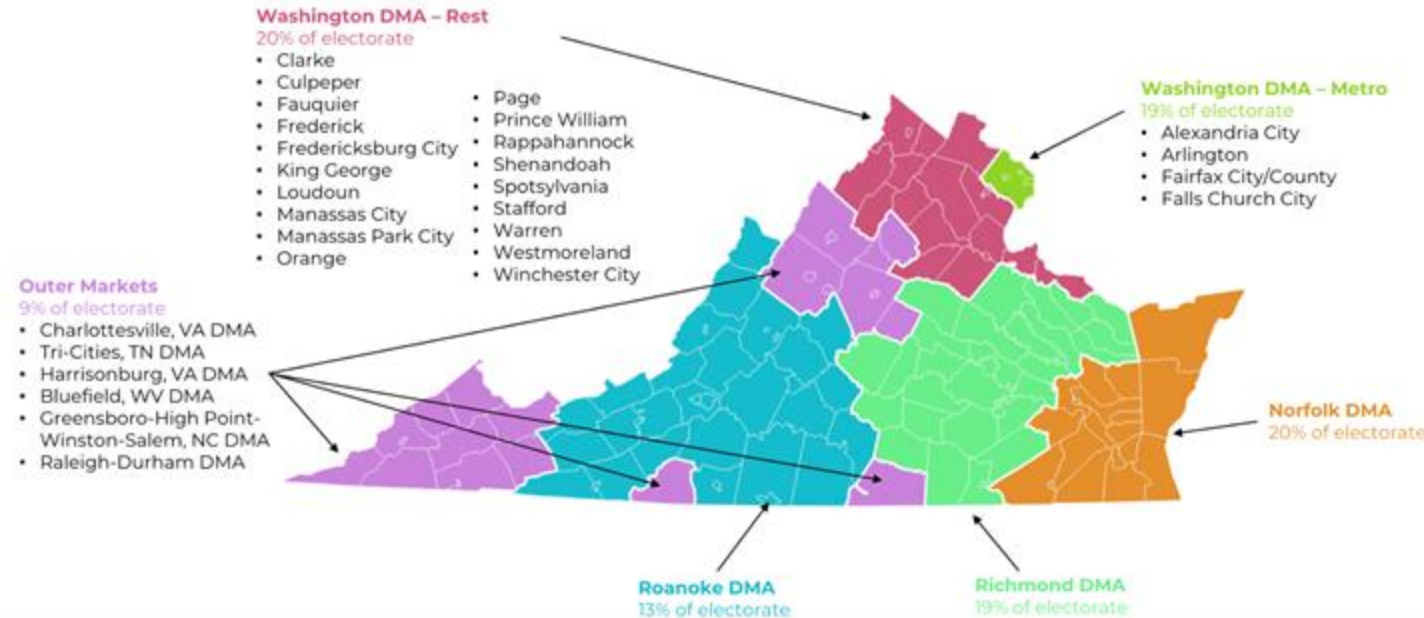
This includes a base sample of 600 interviews and oversamples of the following groups:

- 115 African American likely voters resulting in a total of 216 African American interviews
- 180 Hispanic likely voters resulting in a total of 220 Hispanic interviews
- 180 AAPI likely voters resulting in a total of 209 AAPI interviews

Margin of error

The margin of error at the 95% confidence level is +/- 4.0%.

The margin of error on sub-samples is greater.



TAKEAWAY #1.

Democrats should stop treating crime like a liability and turn safety, accountability, and justice into an asset—especially by targeting “safety and justice” voters.

"SAFETY AND JUSTICE" TARGET VOTERS ARE ROUGHLY 15% OF THE VIRGINIA ELECTORATE

They are less likely to trust Democrats on crime but do not support the GOP candidate. They are also more likely to be people of color, younger, less ideological, and less likely to have gone to college.

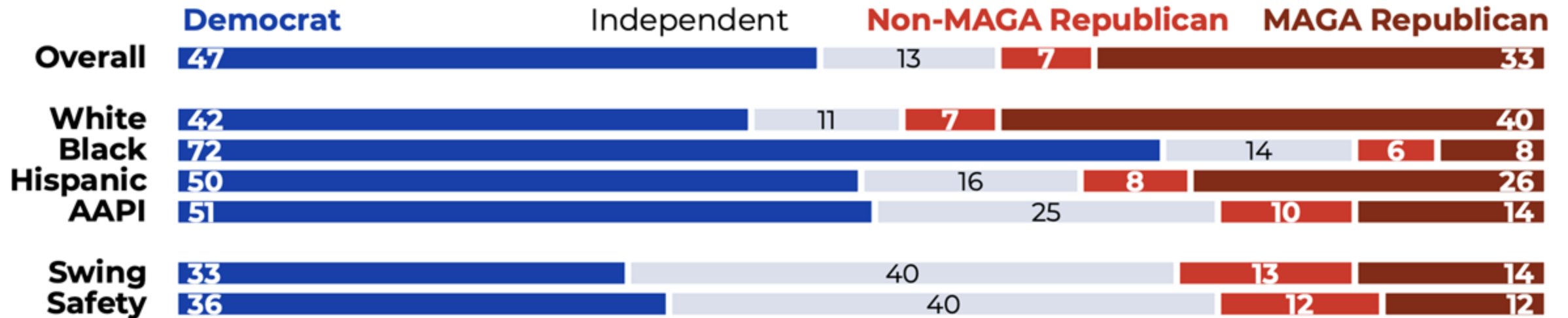
Overall Electorate	Safety Targets	Total
100%	15%	
47	36	Dem
12	40	Ind
41	23	Rep
31	21	Liberal
32	51	Moderate
37	26	Conservative
37	21	Politics v impt
32	28	Politics smwt impt
31	52	Politics not impt

Overall Electorate	Safety Targets	Total
100%	15%	
43	48	<55
57	52	55+
74	61	White
16	24	Black
4	4	Hispanic
6	11	AAPI
26	39	POC

Overall Electorate	Safety Targets	Total
100%	15%	
57	61	Non-college
43	39	College
38	38	DC DMA
19	19	Richmond
20	19	Norfolk
13	11	Roanoke
9	12	Outer Markets
77	67	Seeks out news
23	32	News comes to me

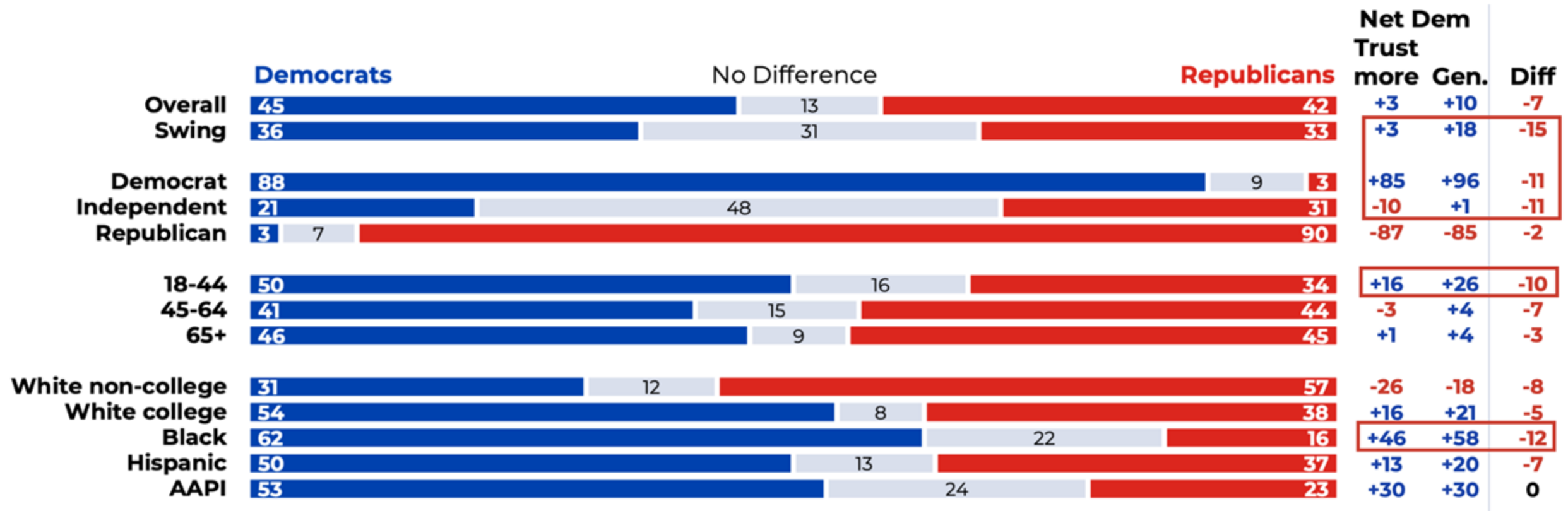
DEMOCRATS HAVE A PRONOUNCED ADVANTAGE IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE IN VIRGINIA

Which party do you identify as belonging to?



YET DEMOCRATS RUN BEHIND THEIR PARTISAN ADVANTAGE WHEN IT COMES TO ISSUES OF CRIME

Which party do you trust more when it comes to improving safety in communities?



TAKEAWAY # 2.

Virginia voters don't buy “tough-on-crime” rhetoric. They want a new approach—and that's being “serious about safety.”

ACROSS EVERY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP, A “SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY” APPROACH BEATS “TOUGH ON CRIME”

Which approach to addressing crime do you agree with most, even if neither is exactly right?

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 longer sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep dangerous people behind bars, and providing police with more support and resources

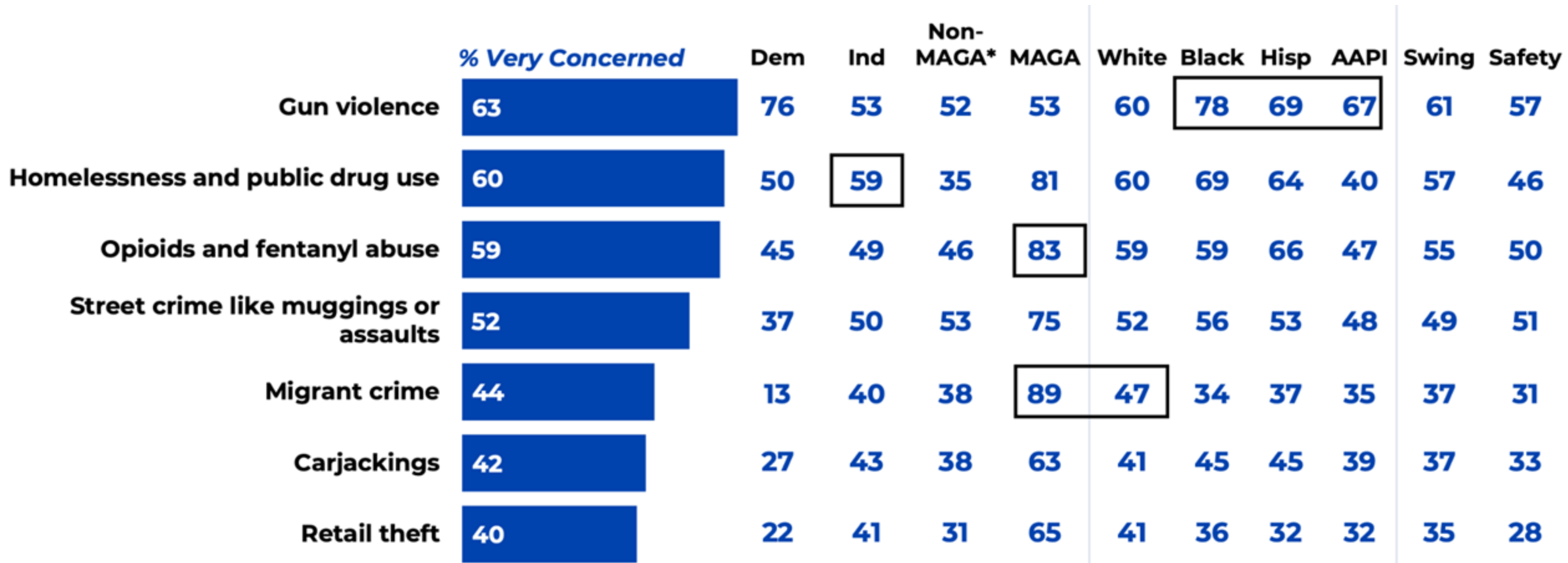


TAKEAWAY # 3.

Keep the debate about crime focused on what matters to Virginia voters—preventing crime; addressing gun violence, drugs, and housing; and better, more accountable policing.

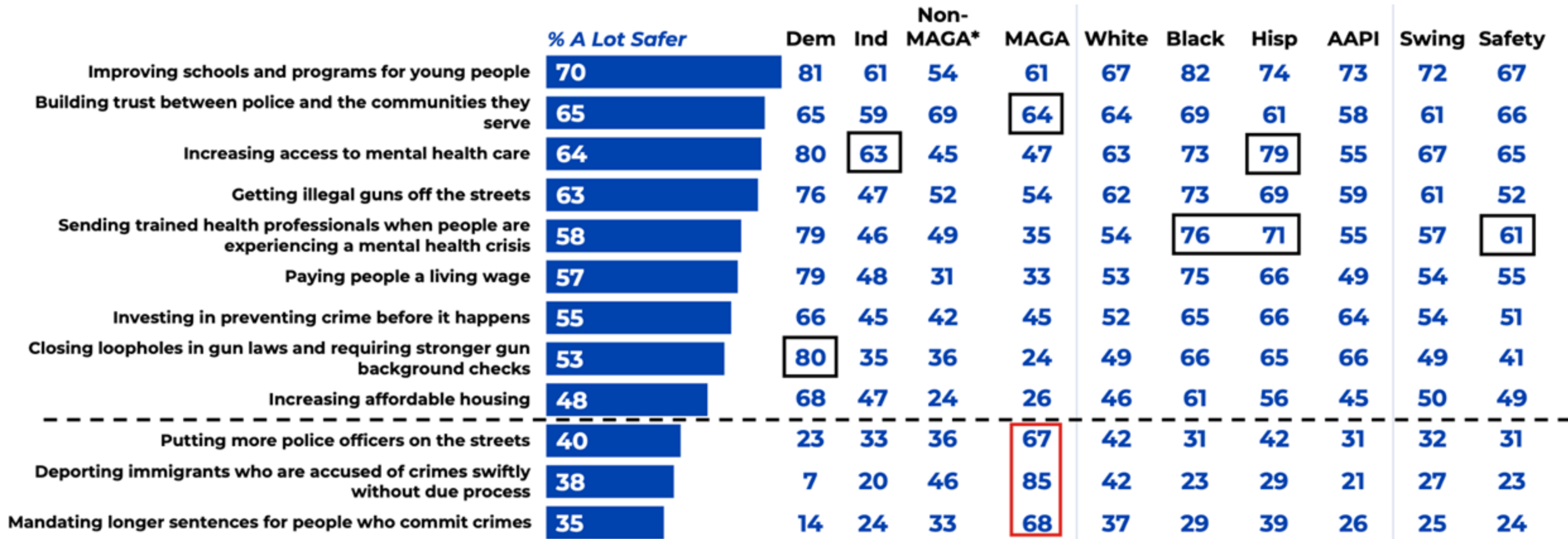
VOTERS SEE THROUGH THE GOP'S FEAR MONGERING WHEN ASKED WHAT CRIMES CONCERN THEM MOST

What crime and public safety issues concern you the most?



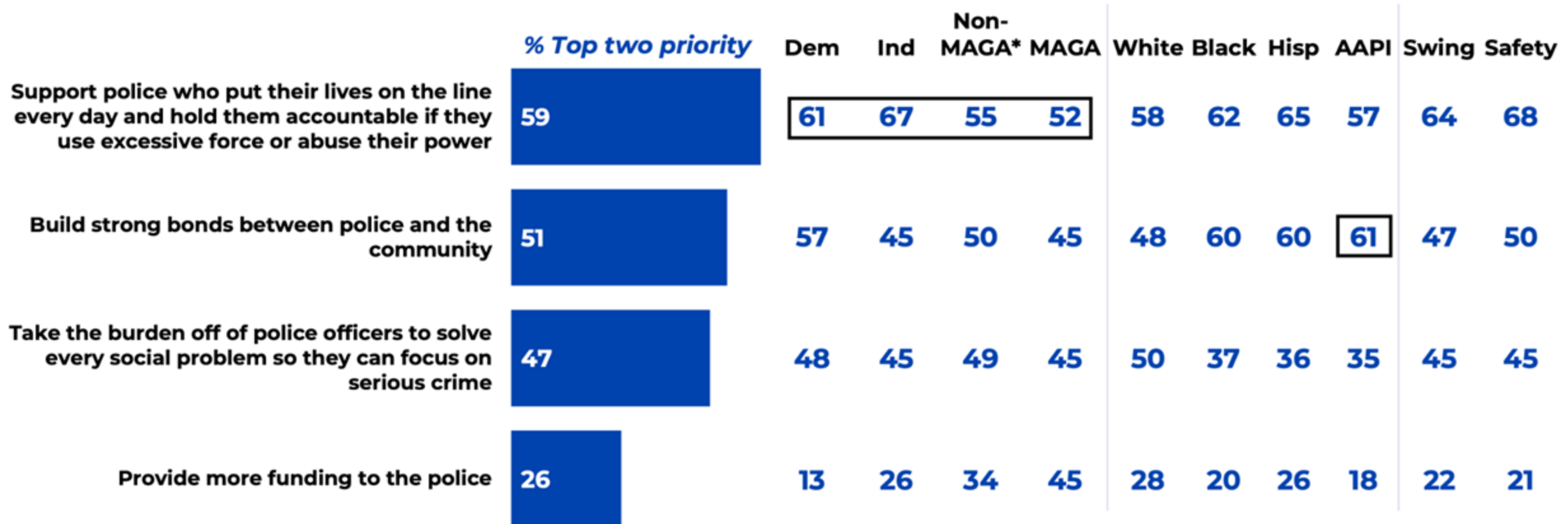
WHEN ASKED ABOUT SOLUTIONS, VOTERS CHOOSE PREVENTION OVER GETTING “TOUGH ON CRIME”

How much safer do you believe the following policy proposals will make your community?



EVEN ON THE THORNIEST ISSUE—POLICING—VOTERS FAVOR A BETTER, MORE ACCOUNTABLE APPROACH

Which of the following approaches to policing are a priority for you?



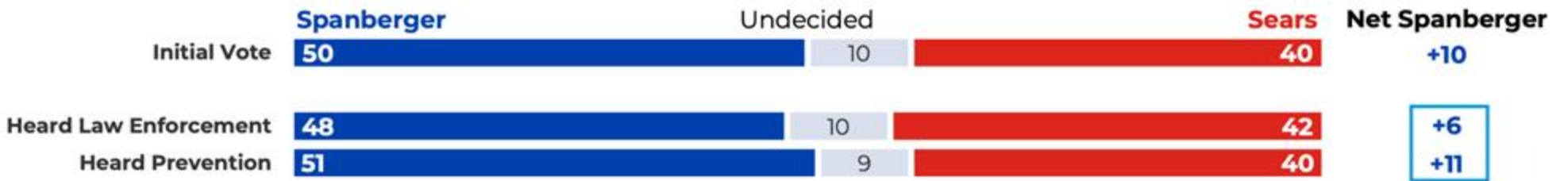
TAKEAWAY # 4.

Get out in front of the “soft-on-crime” and “immigration” attacks with a strong message about safety and justice for all of us.

LEAD GROWS WHEN “SOFT-ON-CRIME” ATTACK IS MET WITH A “SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY” MESSAGE

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

Crime/Safety Debate		% Very Convincing	
		Overall	Swing
Split sample	Spanberger More Law Enforcement For Abigail Spanberger, service to country, community, and the Commonwealth runs deep. Growing up near Richmond... After 9/11, she joined the CIA in the fight against terrorism and later served in Congress, where she led multiple efforts — working with both Democrats and Republicans — <u>to help Virginia's police departments pay for more officers and first responders. As Governor, Spanberger will prioritize making sure Virginia's law enforcement officers have the training, tools, and resources they need to keep our Commonwealth's communities safe.</u>	30	22
	Spanberger Prevention For Abigail Spanberger, service to country, community, and the Commonwealth runs deep. Growing up near Richmond... After 9/11, she joined the CIA in the fight against terrorism and later served in Congress, where she worked with Democrats and Republicans to invest in <u>creating safe communities with good schools and housing that is affordable. As Governor, Spanberger will focus on preventing crime, not just responding after it happens, by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and by getting illegal guns off the street.</u>	31	26
Sears Winsome Earle-Sears was born in Jamaica and immigrated to America as a child... Sears believes crime in Virginia is a growing problem that needs serious action. As Governor, Sears will work to eliminate sanctuary cities, fire rogue prosecutors who are letting dangerous criminals walk the streets, fight Democrat politicians who are trying to defund local police, and work with the FBI Gang Taskforce to catch and deport migrant gang members who are making our streets less safe. Putting Virginians' safety first will always be Sears' top priority.		34	22



EVEN IN THE FACE OF “SOFT-ON-IMMIGRATION” ATTACKS, A BALANCED MESSAGE PERFORMS BETTER

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

Sears Ad

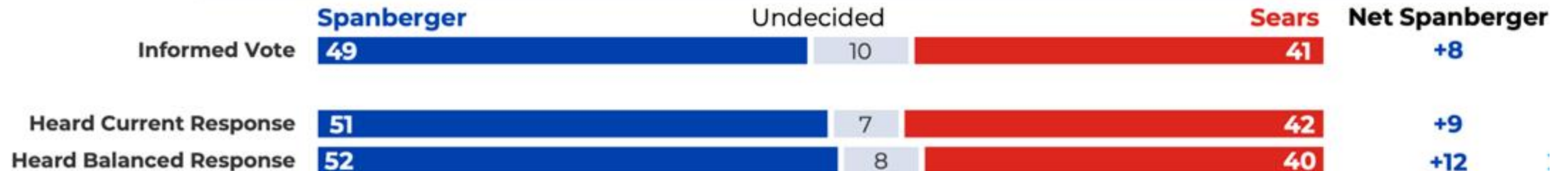
MS-13 and other criminal illegals are threatening communities in Virginia and putting our families in danger. Recently, a top MS-13 leader was arrested in Virginia. Abigail Spanberger voted to allow sanctuary cities that keep vicious and ruthless killers like him in America and on our streets, but Winsome Earle-Sears has a different message for these monsters: Your days in America are numbered. Like Trump, Sears understands that her first job is to keep Virginians safe. As Governor, Sears will do everything in her power to dismantle MS-13 and keep Virginia from becoming a safe haven for migrant criminals.

Spanberger Response – Current

Abigail Spanberger is a former law enforcement officer and mother who cares deeply about the safety of our communities. Spanberger opposes making Virginia a sanctuary state and will prioritize deporting violent offenders. But that shouldn't mean terrorizing communities with indiscriminate raids on schools and churches, or arresting legal, law-abiding immigrants and deporting them without due process. As Governor, Spanberger will work with law enforcement and community leaders on solutions that prioritize safety, respect the rule of law, and recognize the value that immigrants bring to our state.

Spanberger Response – Balanced

Abigail Spanberger is a former law enforcement officer and mother who cares deeply about the safety of our communities. Spanberger believes in safety, stability, and security for everyone. We need a balanced approach to immigration; terrorizing communities with indiscriminate raids on schools and churches, or arresting legal, law-abiding immigrants and deporting them without due process doesn't make us safer. As Governor, Spanberger will work with law enforcement and community leaders on solutions that prioritize safety, respect the rule of law, and recognize the value that immigrants bring to our state.

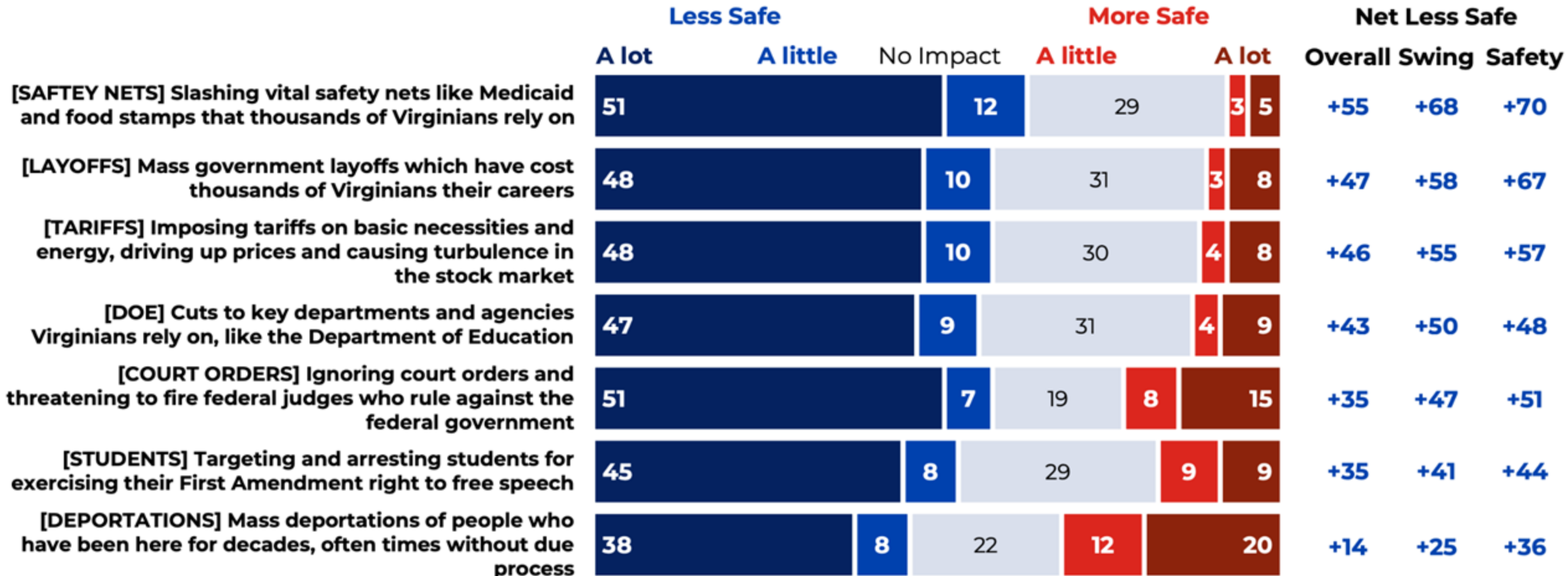


TAKEAWAY # 5.

Tie Trump's actions to making life less safe for everyone—and frame it as making things worse, not as a return to failed policies of the past.

VIRGINIA VOTERS CONNECT THE POLICIES OF THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION WITH THEIR OWN SAFETY

Does this action make Virginia communities more or less safe, or not impact at all?

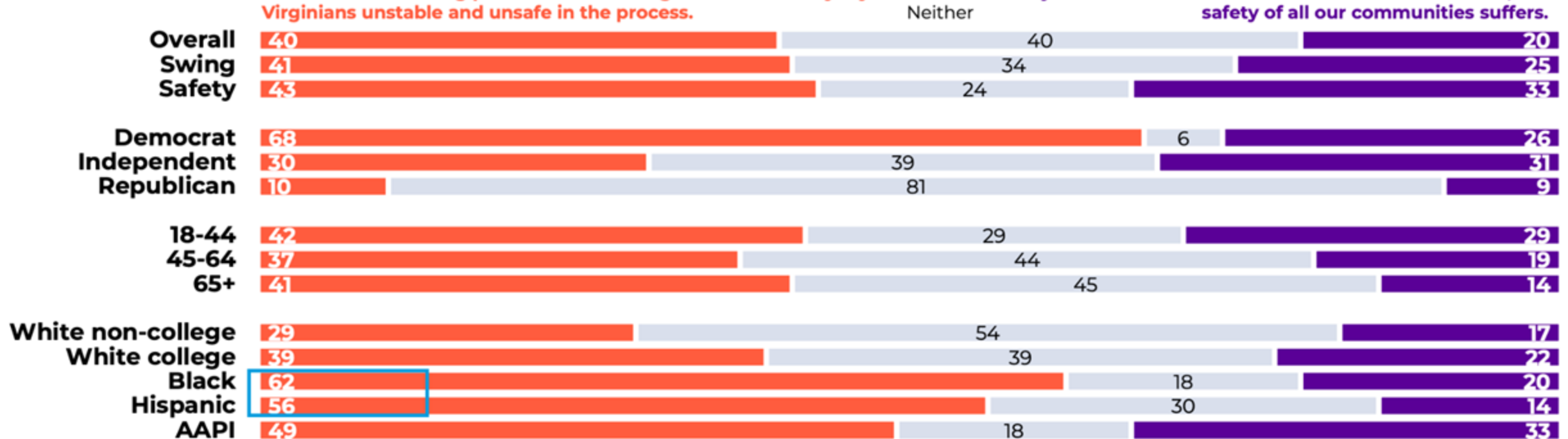


VIRGINIA VOTERS CONNECT THE POLICIES OF THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION WITH THEIR OWN SAFETY

Which message do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?

Americans are already struggling with high costs and instability, but **Republicans are making things worse** by gutting jobs across Virginia and cutting health care, education, and local services to give tax cuts to billionaire donors like Elon Musk. **Republicans are focused on the wrong priorities and making the lives of everyday Virginians unstable and unsafe in the process.**

The Republicans' agenda is a return to the failed policies of the past. It's more tax giveaways for billionaires and Elon Musk's vanity projects, while working Virginians face higher prices and disappearing safety nets. **When people lose their jobs and homes and can't afford food or childcare, the safety of all our communities suffers.**



OWNING OUR VALUES

1. LEAD WITH BEING “SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY”

The phrase “serious about safety” affirmatively positions safety as a core priority and is an effective and pithy counter to any “tough-on-crime” rhetoric from the opposition. Here is the full sentence of what it means to be “serious about safety”: Fully fund things that are proven to prevent crime before it happens and make communities safer, like good schools, jobs, affordable housing, and treatment, and getting illegal guns off the street.

1. NEUTRALIZE ATTACKS WITH “SOLUTIONS OVER SCARE TACTICS”

Go on the offense to call out fear-based and divisive rhetoric about being “tough” or “soft” on crime. Tap into what the majority of voters want—a real set of community-based solutions to prevent crime, respond to crisis, and stop violence. Highlight specific programs and how they work, who they serve, and the impact they have. Trust voters to see through scare tactics and reject exploitation of fear and division if it is called out.

1. REPUBLICANS HAVE THE WRONG PRIORITIES AND ARE MAKING US LESS SAFE

Attack GOP opponents for having gutted jobs, healthcare, education, and local services to give a tax break to the rich—and connect the affordability crisis with safety and feeling less stable and secure.

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