

WINNING THE NARRATIVE ON SAFETY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND JUSTICE

July 2025

VeraACTION

NARRATIVE TIPS

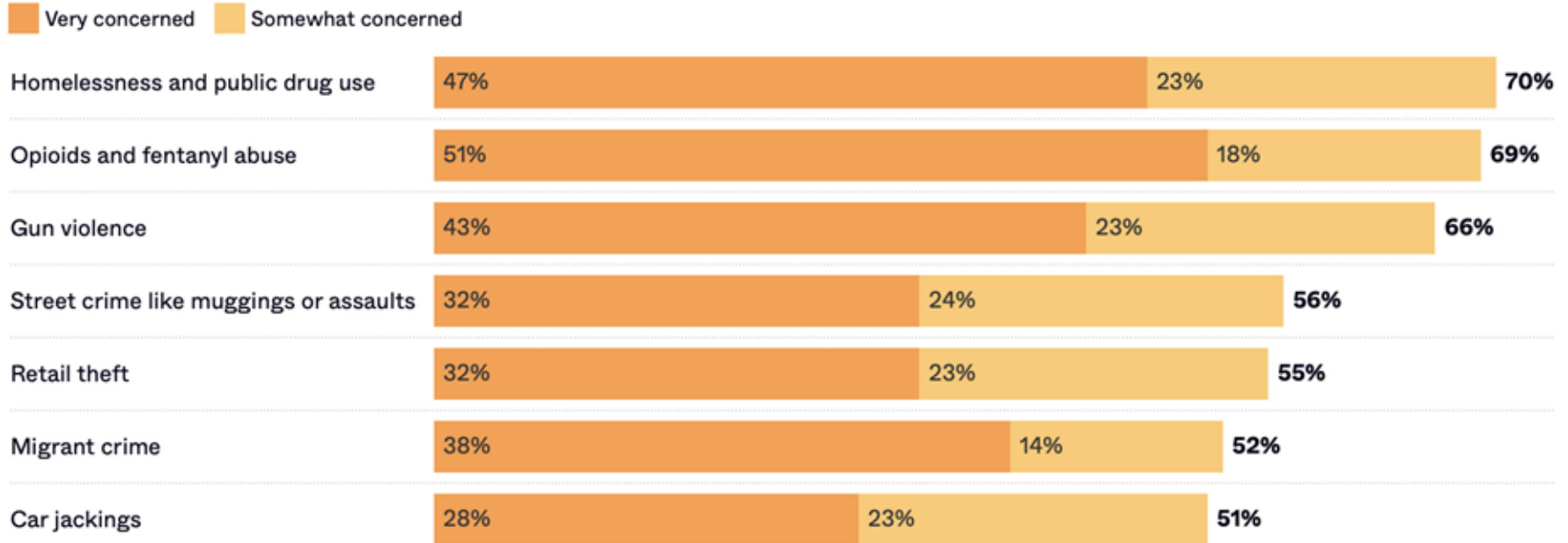
1. **LEAD with the VALUES** of safety, accountability, and justice. Make it known at every turn that our solutions achieve all three — not one or the other.
1. **DELIVER a positive VISION** for the future we will create together. We must describe our vision in relatable, human terms, helping people see beyond what we are fighting against to envision what we are fighting for: a strong, affirmative vision for safety, accountability, and justice.
1. **DEFINE our opposition** as those who use “tough-on-crime” fear-mongering and scapegoating to advance their own political careers while pushing failed policies that keep us from real safety.
1. **FOCUS on solutions.** Most people — and especially those most targeted by militarized policing and impacted by crime and violence — prefer comprehensive solutions over more “tough” measures that mostly react to crime after it happens.
1. **AVOID the opposition frame.** Don’t get into a fight over who is “toughest,” instead expose how politicians and others spread fear and use scare tactics to keep power and prevent us from getting what we need to be safe.

TAKEAWAY # 1:

Lead with your values while emphasizing investments in the full range of tools in the public safety toolbox to prevent crime, respond to crisis, and stop violence.

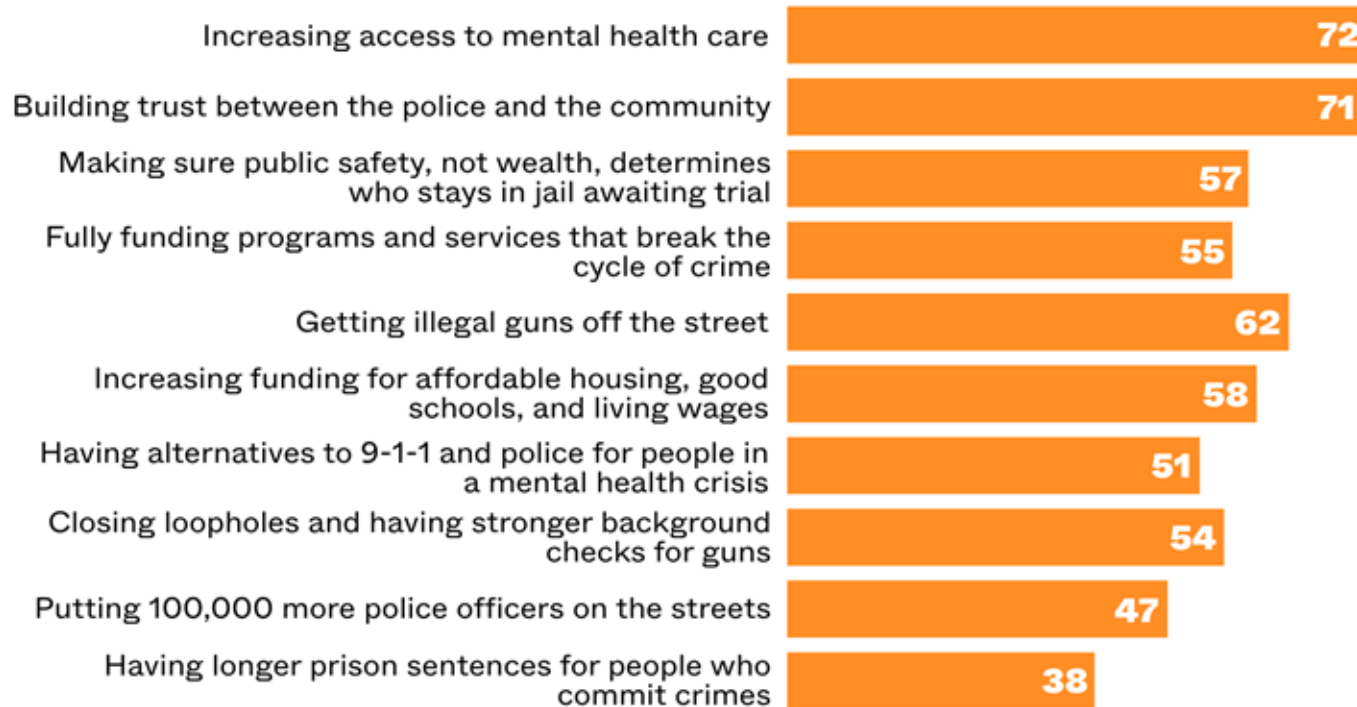
WHAT ARE AMERICAN VOTERS' BIGGEST CONCERNS ABOUT SAFETY? HOMELESSNESS, DRUGS, AND GUNS

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?



ESSENTIAL TO COUPLE VALUES WITH POLICIES THAT WORK TO CREATE SAFER COMMUNITIES

- Lead with safety
- Talk about preventing and breaking cycles of crime
- Include immediate and long-term solutions
- And own accountability and justice too

“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.”

TAKEAWAY # 2:

People continue to support comprehensive strategies and fear that Trump's recent actions could undermine public safety

VOTERS FEAR TRUMP'S ACTIONS ARE MAKING US LESS SAFE

“For each of those, please say if that action makes you feel more safe, less safe, or has no impact on safety?”

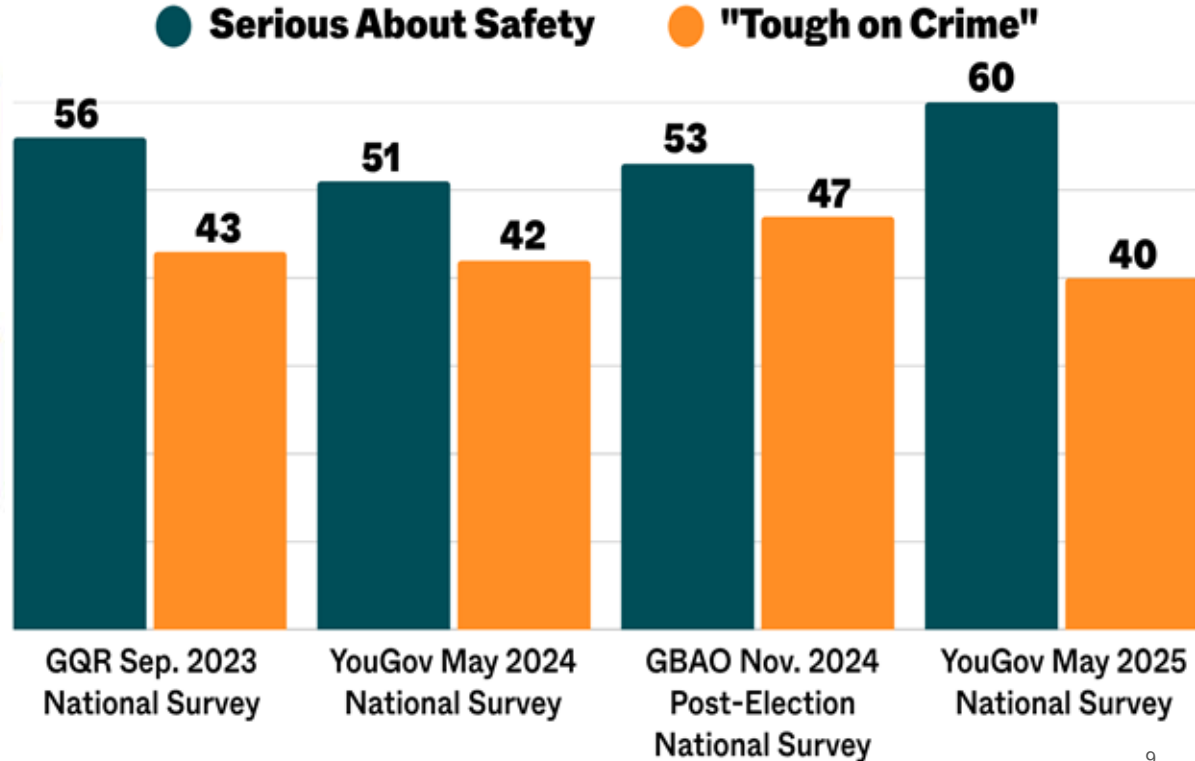
% who say “**less safe**”

- Cutting funding for community violence intervention, victim services, gun violence prevention, and mental health crisis response programs.....**64%**
- Freezing funding for after-school and summer youth programs.....**57%**
- Cutting funding for programs like Medicaid and food stamps.....**54%**
- Fully funding programs and services that break the cycle of crime.....**53%**

MOST VOTERS STILL SUPPORT A SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY APPROACH OVER A “TOUGH” ALTERNATIVE

(SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY) Fully fund things that are proven to create safe communities and improve people’s quality of life, like good schools, a living wage, and affordable housing, and do more to prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and getting illegal guns off the street.

(TOUGH ON CRIME) Doing more to get tough on crime, like having tougher sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep potentially dangerous people in jail, and providing police more support and resources.



VOTERS SUPPORT “LIFTING THE BURDEN” OVER UNLEASHING POLICE

Which of the following statements from a candidate for office come closest to your view?

Crime is out of control because woke policies have blocked the police from doing their jobs. Law enforcement maintains public safety by letting people know that if they commit a crime, they will face consequences. It’s simple: more police equals less crime. Police should not be held back while they work to restore peace-of-mind to law-abiding citizens. We need to support the police to do their jobs—anything less puts us all at risk. **44%**

It isn’t fair to expect the police to solve every social problem. No one profession can do that. The police should focus on investigating and solving serious crimes and send trained experts to help people who are homeless or in crisis. By sending the right first responder, we can make our communities safer. This is not anti-police. We can support police doing their jobs while holding them accountable if they abuse their power or break the law. **56%**

TAKEAWAY # 3:

New York City primary showed that defining your own vision on safety, accountability, and justice can overcome “crime” fear-mongering

ZOHRAN DEFUSED “DEFUND” AD BARRAGE BY TALKING ABOUT LIFTING THE BURDEN

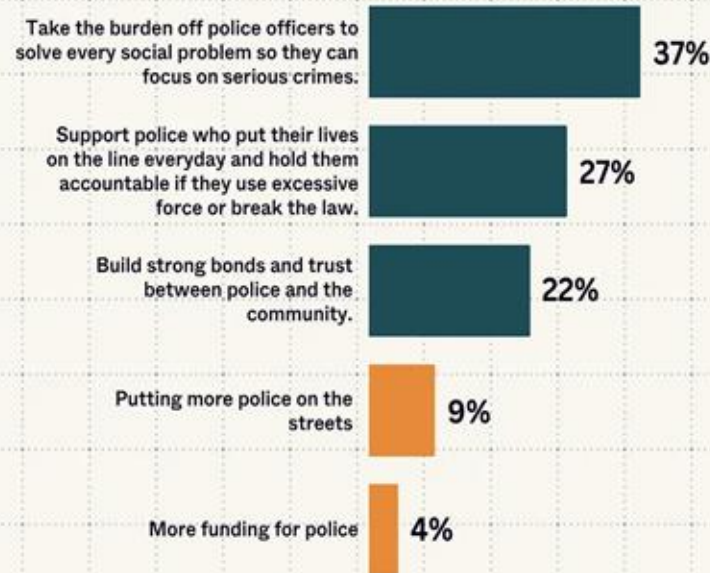
“An affordable city must also be a safe one. As multiple categories of crimes remain stubbornly high and too many New Yorkers feel uneasy in our subways, we will create the Department of Community Safety to deploy evidence-proven methods of addressing mental health crises, homelessness and hate.

“Police have a critical role to play. But right now, we’re relying on them to deal with our frayed social safety net — which prevents them from doing their actual jobs.”

“In my Department of Community Safety, we are going to put together dedicated teams of mental health outreach workers.... We are actually going to address this in a manner that goes beyond the same ideas that we hear time and time again recycled by the same politicians.”

For New York City voters, campaigning for more police and increased funding for police missed the mark. A plurality of Democratic primary voters support **“taking the burden off police officers to solve every social problem so they can focus on serious crimes.”**

Which of the following statements about police do you support most?

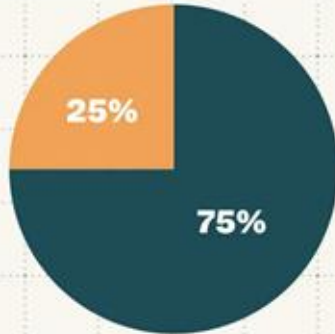


NYC PRIMARY VOTERS PREFERRED EFFORTS TO LIFT THE BURDEN, NOT SPEND MORE MONEY ON POLICE

New York City voters are interested in **policy solutions that prevent crime and respond to crises**, not ones that champion “tough” solutions that are more about political theater than policy efficacy.

Which of the following comes closest to your own view about how to address crime and public safety?

- “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.”



Source: Change Research New York City survey commissioned by Vera Action, June 2025

“We need to actually **deliver public safety**. We need to aggressively pursue **evidence-based solutions** . . . because what New Yorkers want—they want **accountability**. They want **safety**. They also want **justice**. These are things we can deliver together if we have a mayor that is actually focused on them.”

Zohran Mamdani

In an interview with Telemundo in June

VALUES, VISION, VILLAIN FRAMEWORK

1. Get off the opposition's turf while using the “**values, villain, vision**” framework.

Instead of trying to “out-tough” the opposition, affirmatively message about safety, accountability, and justice.

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

Acknowledge the universal desire to feel safe and that we deserve an honest conversation rooted in solutions—not scare tactics—about what makes communities safe.

3. Call out scapegoating **villains** and say “I’m about solutions, not scare tactics.”

Across the political spectrum, a majority don’t believe “tough on crime” is the right approach. Name the empty scare tactics as distractions from the actions that are endangering our communities. If “tough on crime” worked, we would be the safest country in the world.

4. Pivot to a **vision** by pointing to *the concrete solutions that work*.

Our cities are safer when we invest in young people, families, and neighborhoods—not tough-on-crime measures. Call out policies that have made communities less safe, and highlight the programs driving immediate and long-term solutions.