



The Crime and Public Safety Landscape in American Politics

January 29, 2026

Analysis prepared by Center for American Progress Action Fund (CAP Action) based on survey research conducted September 23-29, 2025 by Blue Rose Research and released publicly. Additional materials originally published by CAP Action and conducted by Global Strategy Group, Impact Research, and Upswing Research.

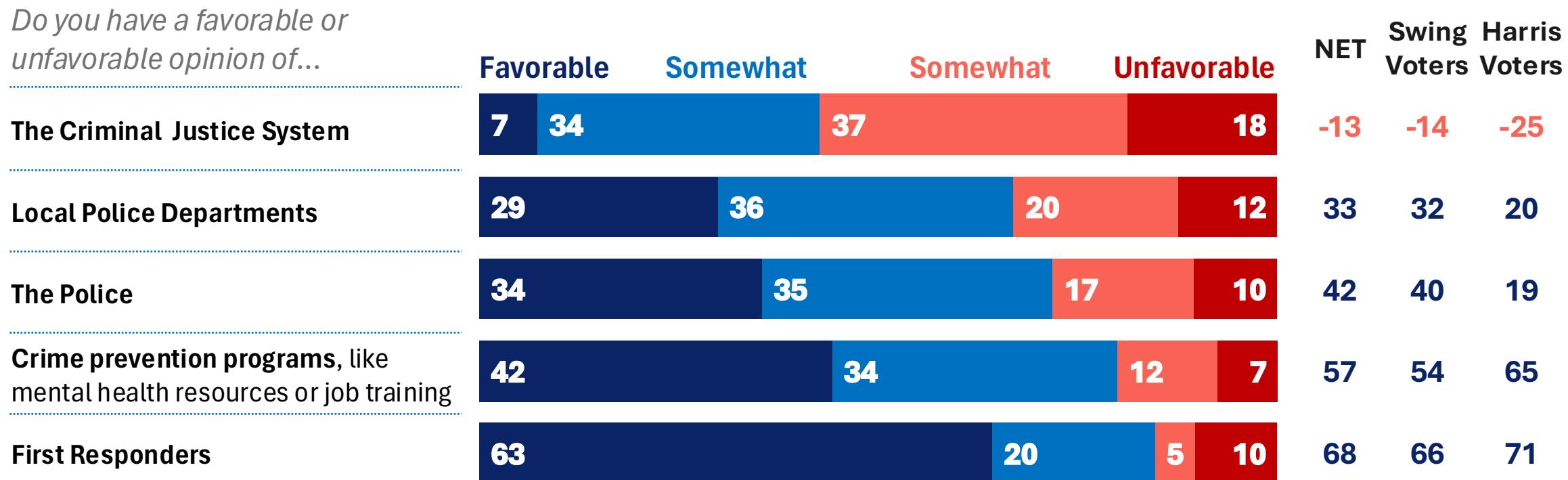


(Getty/Neal McNeil)

1. The Landscape

Most Americans, regardless of partisanship, have a personal experience with crime. The issue remains in the background, every day, even if it is not a top concern. Americans want mayors and local law enforcement to be primarily responsible for keeping communities safe.

Voters' unfavorable views on the criminal justice system do not extend to the people who serve within it.



Americans feel safe at home but perceive crime to be rising. Trump voters are 10 points more likely to hold this view.

From what you know, is **crime in the country** currently rising, falling, or staying about the same?

Response	Overall	Harris	Swing	Trump
Rising	42%	40%	40%	44%
Falling	19%	22%	20%	16%
Staying about the same	30%	31%	32%	30%
Not sure	8%	7%	8%	9%
Net Rising	23%	18%	20%	28%

Generally speaking, how **safe** do you feel in **your neighborhood**?

Response	Overall
Totally unsafe	2%
Mostly unsafe	5%
Mostly safe	48%
Very safe	43%
Not sure	1%

Most voters have a personal, daily experience with crime.

Have you or someone you know been a victim of the following crimes? Select all that apply.

Response	Overall	Swing
Robbery	15%	14%
Carjacking	5%	5%
Theft	32%	31%
Assault	22%	19%
Gun violence	10%	9%
Domestic violence	26%	25%
Burglary	17%	18%
Fraud	26%	27%
Other	4%	5%
NA	40%	37%

How much would you say crime where you live is affecting your **day-to-day** life?

Response	Overall
A lot	3%
Some	15%
A little	34%
Not at all	46%
Not sure	2%

Without partisan cues, voters generally supported strong action to tackle crime.

Crime is out of control and requires a comprehensive new crime bill and **emergency federal action**, such as deploying Federal law enforcement and the National Guard.

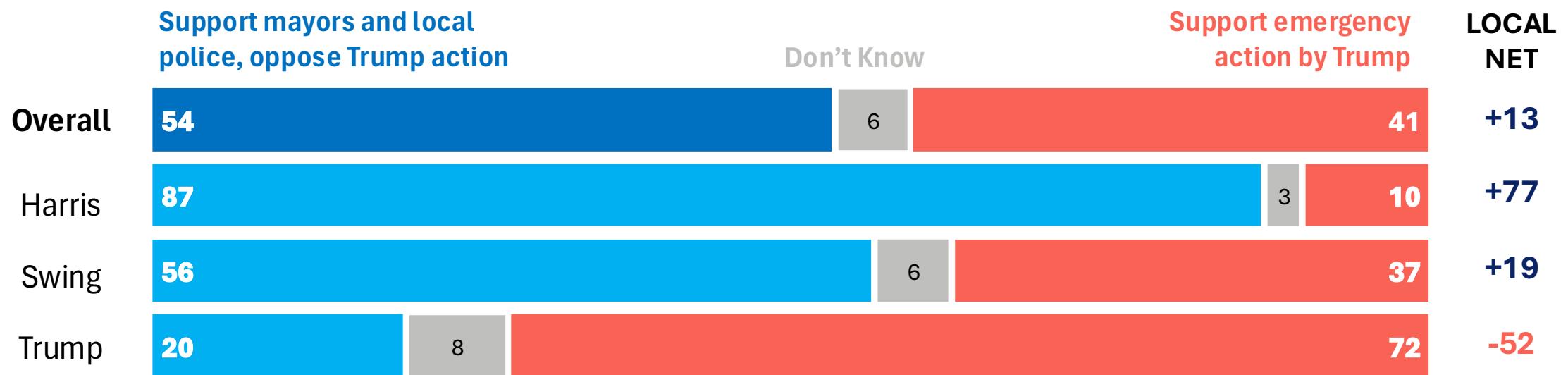
Response	Overall	Harris	Swing	Trump
Strongly agree	24%	10%	21%	39%
Somewhat agree	29%	16%	32%	41%
Somewhat disagree	16%	21%	19%	11%
Strongly disagree	26%	48%	23%	5%
Not sure	4%	4%	5%	4%
Agree	53%	26%	53%	80%
Disagree	42%	70%	42%	15%
Net Agree	11%	-44%	11%	65%

A clear majority of voters opposed Trump's emergency actions and sided with local officials to keep communities safe.

Even if neither is perfect, which comes closer to your view?

Keeping us safe is one of the most important jobs **Mayors and local police** have. President **Trump is making their jobs more difficult and making local communities less safe.**

Crime is out of control in American cities. **President Trump should take emergency action** and use federal law enforcement to keep Americans safe.





2. Partisan Traits

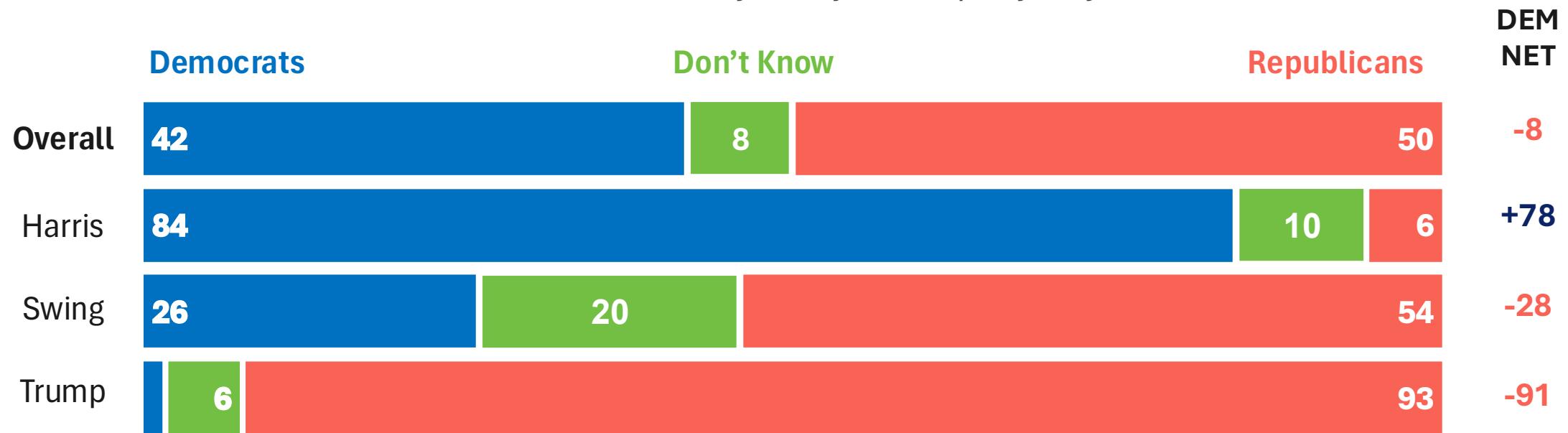
Republicans have a brand advantage on crime.

Voters expect Democrats to help people in need and are skeptical Democratic officials will be able to hold people accountable. This key character trait influences the policies voters believe Democrats will advance.

(Getty/Alan Schein Photography)

Democrats are less trusted than Republicans on crime and public safety, with the gap depending on the precise question.

On issues related to crime and community safety, which party do you trust more?



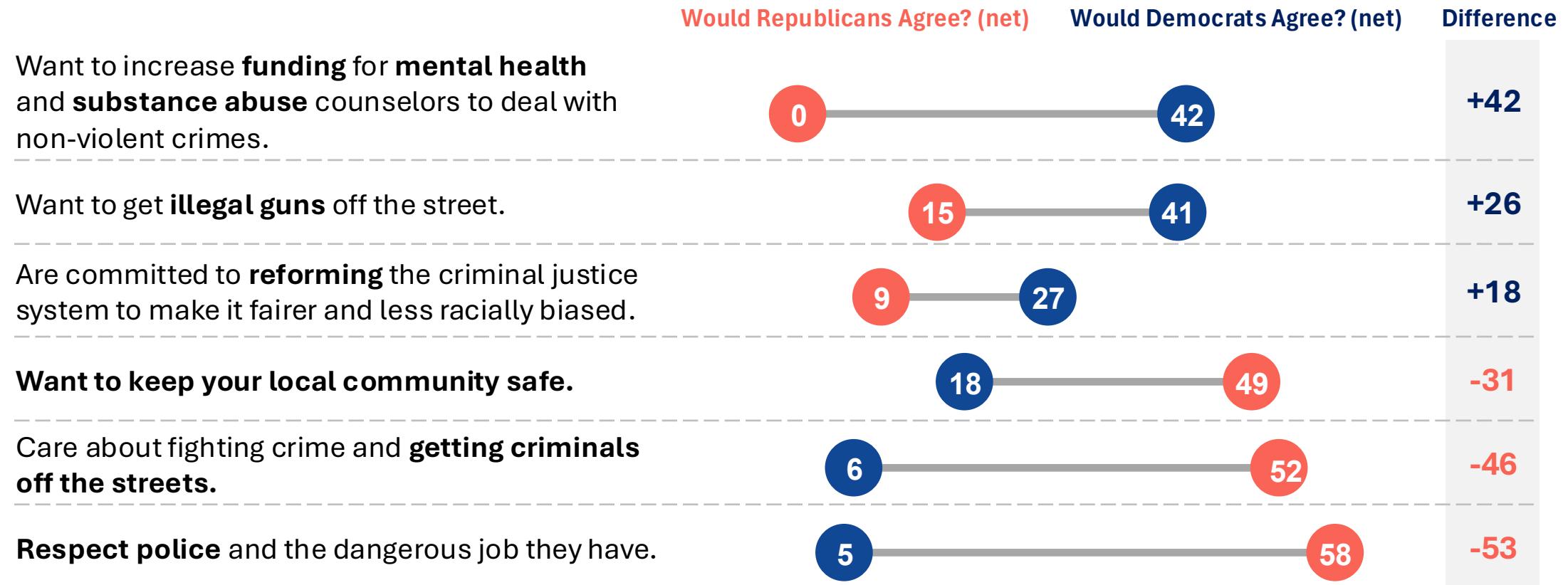
FYI: NBC Poll, Sept 2025: When it comes to each of the following, which party you think would do a better job? **Dealing with crime:** Dem: 20% - Rep: 46% **NET DEM:** -26

Source: **Blue Rose Research**, September 2025. Online survey of 3,299 respondents.

NBC News survey of 1,000 registered voters conducted Sept. 15-19, with a margin of error of ± 3.1 percentage points

<https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/first-read/poll-republicans-advantages-immigration-crime-economy-rcna117054>

Voters barely believe Democrats even care about fighting crime or respect police.



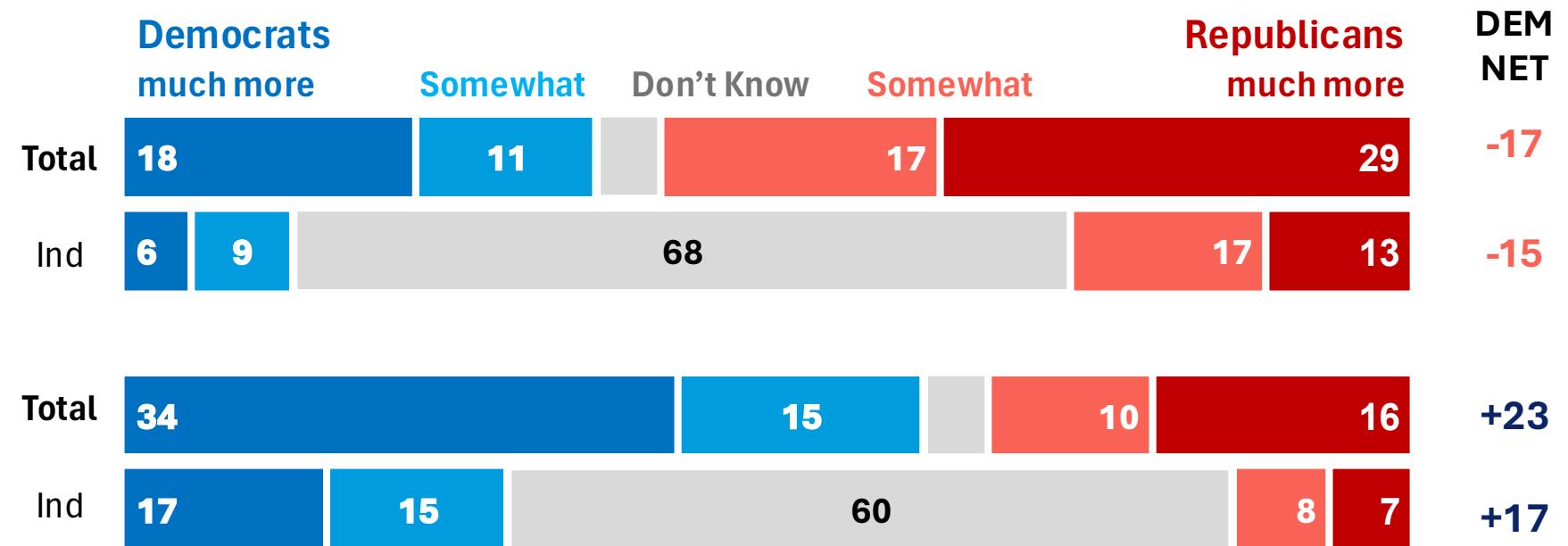
Voters assume Republicans will lead on accountability and Democrats will focus on prevention.

FIRST respondents are split in groups and rate a variety of policies:

Accountability Policies:
e.g., tough sentences for people who commit crimes.

Prevention Policies:
e.g., increase funding for mental health counseling and drug abuse treatment.

THEN they are asked: “Which party in Congress do you think is more likely to introduce the package you just read about?”

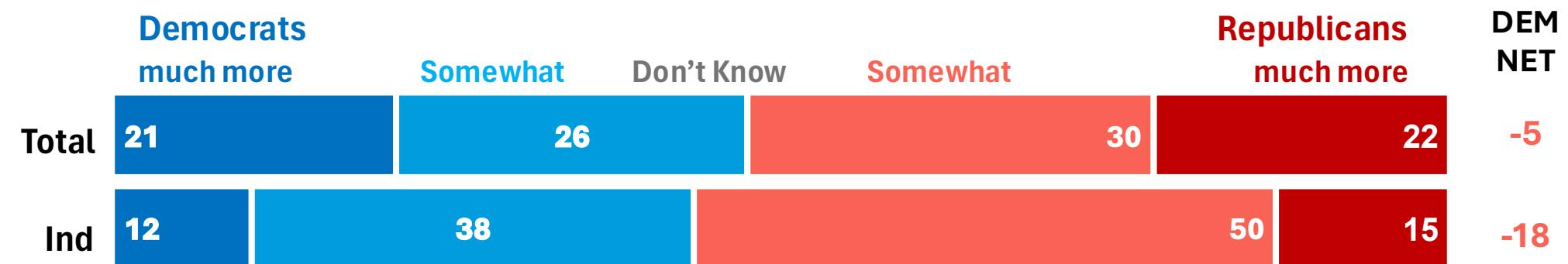


Democrats not associated with “holding people accountable,” a key character trait individuals can focus on.

“Below is a list of traits and characteristics. Please indicate whether, overall, you think it describes the Democrats OR the Republicans better”

Jan 2025:

Will hold people accountable when something goes wrong

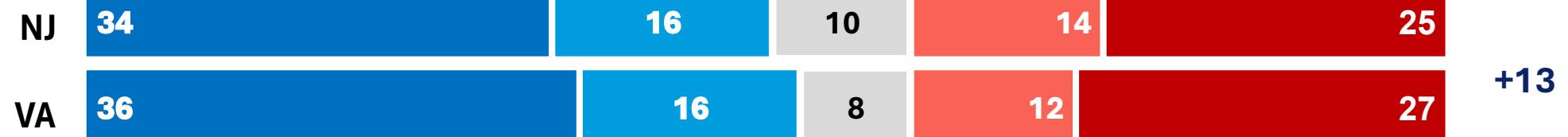


Nov 2025:

Would hold people accountable

Sherrill / Spanberger

Ciattarelli/Earle-Sears



Among Independents, Sherrill and Spanberger were +1



3. What Americans Want

Candidates must clear the hurdle voters have set on accountability to win. After this, it can be effective to press other advantages. Center-left leaders must fulfill the basic responsibility of local officials to make sure people who commit crime face swift and certain consequences.

(Getty/Grace Cary)

Democrats are most competitive when they clear the bar on accountability.

Even if neither is perfect, which comes closer to your view?

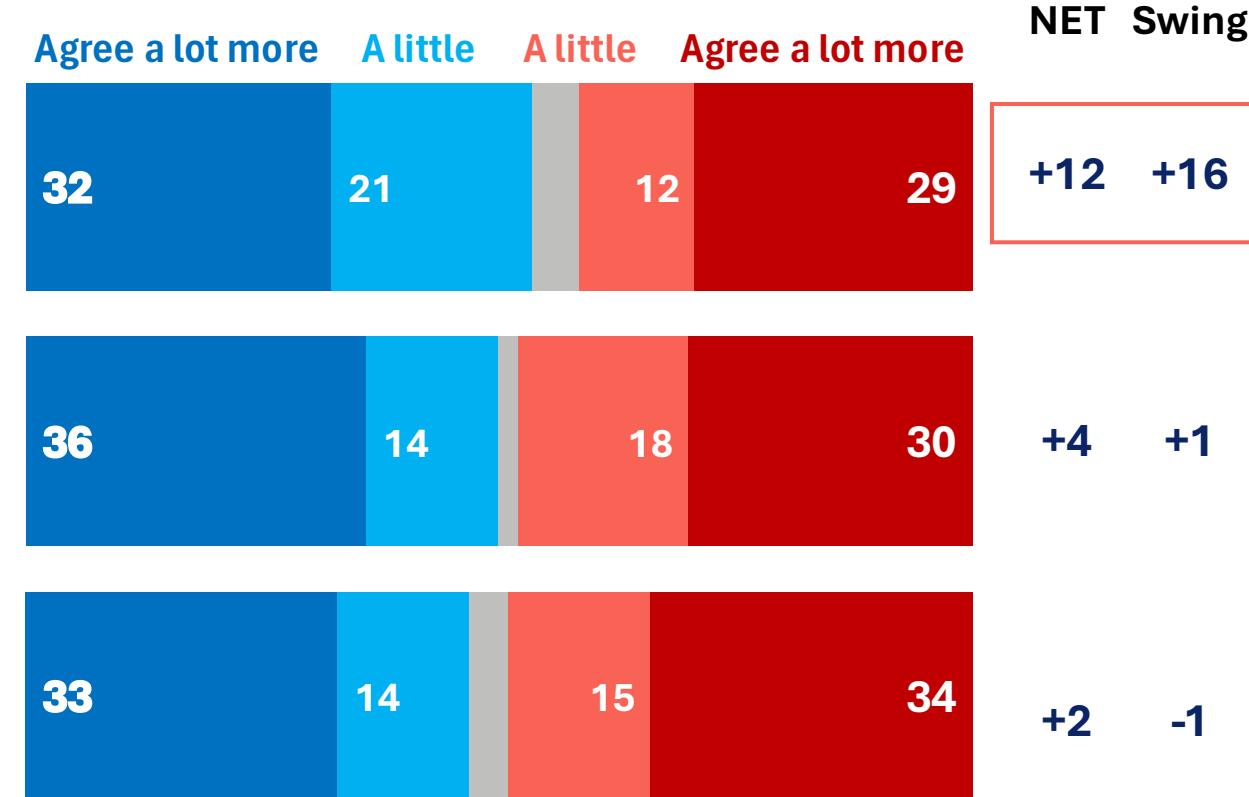
Republicans say violent crime is **out of control** in American cities and we need to **send in the troops and police** and end crazy state policies like cashless bail that **lets murderers loose** to keep citizens safe.

Democrats say...

Violent crime is a serious problem that needs real solutions. We must **hire thousands of new police officers and detectives** to provide order, deter future crime, and **catch criminals when they break the law** to keep our communities safe.

Violent crime is a serious problem. We must **have more police to catch and hold criminals accountable** when they break the law, **and affordable housing, job training and treatment to prevent crime** from happening in the first place.

Crime is a serious issue, but **rates of violent crime are dropping** across the country. This is a desperate attempt by Republicans to **change the subject from their cuts to Medicaid and Trump's tariffs**, which are destroying our economy and raising prices on everything.



To secure majority support for policies, it's best to demonstrate the values they are based on.

Which of the following ideas do you believe will make a bigger difference to bring down crime?

Democrats say we should ...

MaxDiff: % of time policies are selected when randomly paired against each other.

Make sure that people who commit crimes are **swiftly prosecuted and held accountable** in the criminal justice system, deterring future crime and ensuring victims have closure.

61%

Recruit and retain good police officers and make sure they have the resources and support they need to do their difficult job.

59%

Invest in strategies to prevent crime before it happens, including **working with kids after school and to get them jobs** so they have something to do.

56%

Make sure communities stay safe by **hiring more police officers** to stop crime before it happens and hold perpetrators accountable.

56%

Dismantle violent criminal organizations and cartels that are profiting off of **gun and drug trafficking** and making our communities less safe.

55%

Ensure there are professional **first responders** that can be dispatched to 911 calls that don't require police, like mental health emergencies, so police can focus on serious crime.

49%

Break the cycle of repeat offenses by ensuring that **people in reentry** can stabilize their lives and contribute to society.

48%

Stop crime by focusing resources on the **small number of people who commit the vast majority of violent crimes** and work with communities to hold people accountable.

46%

Voters believe Democrats' best ideas center accountability, high-quality policing and targeted prevention.

Make sure that people who commit crimes are **swiftly prosecuted and held accountable** in the criminal justice system, deterring future crime and ensuring victims have closure.

Recruit and retain good police officers and make sure they have the resources and support they need to do their difficult job.

Invest in strategies to prevent crime before it happens, including **working with kids after school and to get them jobs** so they have something to do.

Make sure communities stay safe by **hiring more police officers** to stop crime before it happens and hold perpetrators accountable.

Dismantle violent criminal organizations and cartels that are profiting off of **gun and drug trafficking** and making our communities less safe.

	Overall	Swing	18-34	65+	Black
Make sure that people who commit crimes are swiftly prosecuted and held accountable in the criminal justice system, deterring future crime and ensuring victims have closure.	61%	61%	59%	64%	55%
Recruit and retain good police officers and make sure they have the resources and support they need to do their difficult job.	59%	59%	54%	62%	55%
Invest in strategies to prevent crime before it happens, including working with kids after school and to get them jobs so they have something to do.	56%	55%	57%	55%	58%
Make sure communities stay safe by hiring more police officers to stop crime before it happens and hold perpetrators accountable.	56%	57%	52%	59%	49%
Dismantle violent criminal organizations and cartels that are profiting off of gun and drug trafficking and making our communities less safe.	55%	55%	53%	57%	53%

Swift and certain consequences are more effective than severe and delayed punishment.

61%

Make sure that people who commit crimes are **swiftly prosecuted and held accountable** in the criminal justice system, deterring future crime and ensuring victims have closure.

-  Increase funding for local crime intelligence, including real-time crime centers, expansion of crime labs, ballistic imaging technology, and CGICs
-  Hire more local prosecutors to staff specialized units that focus on prosecuting violent and complex crimes
-  Expand and fully staff judicial, prosecutorial, and public defender positions to reduce caseloads and ensure individualized justice
-  Increase federal funding for alternative prosecution models
-  Federal funding for state and local law enforcement agencies to hire additional detectives to solve homicides and nonfatal shootings.

Recruiting and retaining the best police is politically strong and responds to a real policy challenge facing departments.

59%

Recruit and retain good police officers and make sure they have the resources and support they need to do their difficult job.

- Provide grants to local law enforcement agencies to support efforts to recruit, hire, and retain motivated and qualified officer candidates
- Support officers' mental health and well-being by providing grant funding to local law enforcement agencies to increase officer wellness and peer support services
- Provide resources and set best practice standards to improve 911 response times nationwide and increase recruitment and job quality for 911 professionals.
- Prioritize police time and improve outcomes by investing in community responder models and encourage law enforcement agencies to establish civilian roles

	Recruit Police	Hire Police
Overall	59%	56%
Swing	59%	57%
18-34	54%	52%
65+	62%	59%
Black	55%	49%

Gun and drug trafficking are critical public safety issues.

55%

Dismantle violent criminal organizations and cartels that are profiting off of gun and drug trafficking and making our communities less safe.

Gun Trafficking

-  State gun dealer licensing; requiring firearms to be securely stored and mandating the reporting of lost and stolen firearms
-  Hire additional industry operation investigators to ensure regular inspections of gun dealers and manufacturers; litigation to hold the gun industry accountable

Drug Trafficking

-  Persists because those at the top of the chain too often escape accountability, while low-level offenders bear the brunt of enforcement and are easily replaced.
-  Law enforcement must go upstream, targeting the networks and profiteers who drive the illicit market



4. Summary

As Federal officials trade their credibility for loyalty to Trump, challengers have a unique moment to be trusted on matters of law enforcement. Americans are looking for leaders that have the stomach to hold people accountable. By focusing on the big values behind individual charges or convictions, leaders can more easily tap into majority support.

(Getty/Alan Schein Photography)

Key Takeaways on Crime and Public Safety

Crime can always be salient. **Democrats must engage on the topic to overcome perceptions they do not care**, the worst outcomes occur when leaders refuse to acknowledge crime.

Demonstrate you can hold people accountable when something goes wrong. This is a critical character trait Democratic candidates must show and impacts issues beyond public safety.

Be on the side of local law enforcement. When needed, contrast your support of local police and officials with the chaos caused by federal officials.

Americans make big assumptions about how Democrats and Republicans will approach public safety. **On crime, Democrats must first clear a hurdle with voters who do not believe Democrats care about keeping them safe.** Understanding and addressing this baked-in perception is critical.

Americans want a public safety agenda centered on accountability and backed up by relationships with local law enforcement. This strategy allows leaders to overcome skepticism and unlock public support for targeted prevention policies such as after school programs and job training as well as proven evidence-based policies for quality policing.