

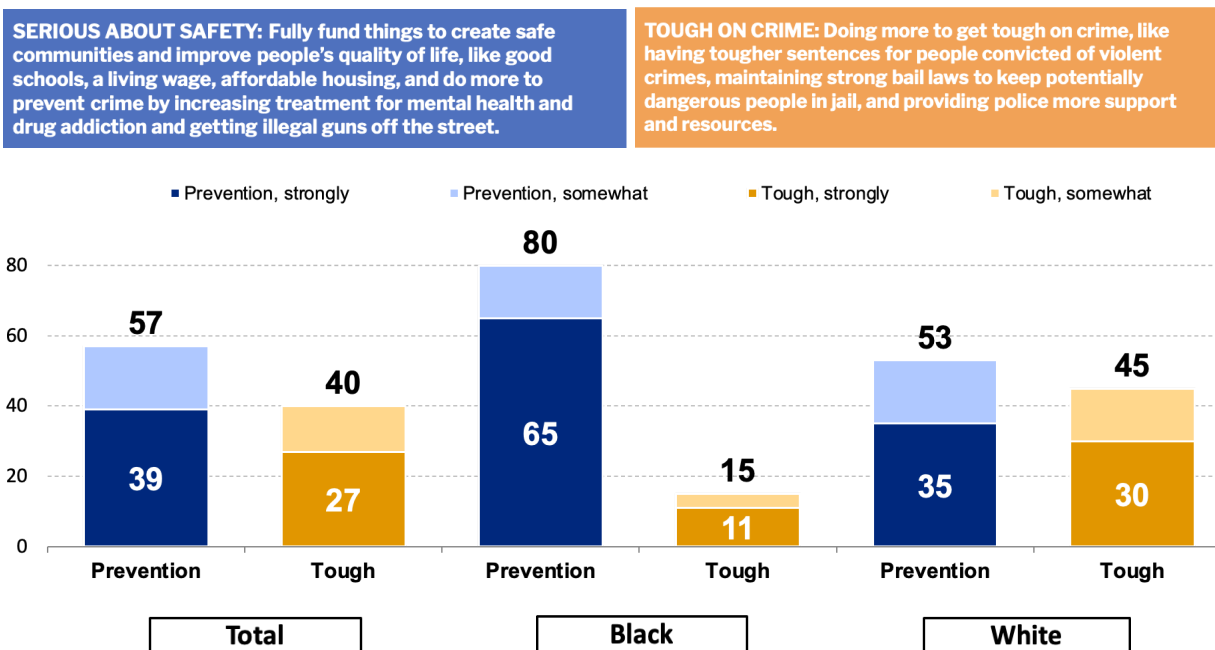
Winning the Narrative on Safety, Accountability, and Justice in Michigan

In October 2023, Vera Action commissioned the polling firm GQR to conduct a 20 minute survey with 800 registered Michigan voters to measure Michiganders’ opinions on issues of crime and public safety and identify effective ways to communicate on these issues.

The results suggest that candidates and elected officials in the state can get in front of the inevitable “soft-on-crime” attacks by proactively defining themselves as **serious about safety** and emphasizing three key aspects of safety that are important to *all* Michiganders: preventing crime, responding to crisis, and stopping violence. At the same time, Michiganders care deeply about **accountability and justice**, and are eager for their elected officials to lean into the policy solutions that help all Michigan communities thrive. Below are five key takeaways from the research:

1. Michiganders prefer a comprehensive approach to crime and safety over a narrow “tough-on-crime” one. This is especially true for the Michiganders who are most concerned about crime.

When asked which came closer to their views on how crime and public safety should be handled, 57 percent of Michigan voters chose a “serious about safety” approach. This language especially resonates with the voters most concerned about crime, Black voters and Detroit/Dearborn residents, who prefer a “serious about safety” approach by 80-15 and 75-22 margins, respectively.



2. When it comes to their preferred policy solutions for decreasing crime, a majority of Michigan voters believe that reform policies, including increasing access to drug prevention and treatment, are more effective than “tough on crime” measures.

Michigan voters know that we do not need to choose between justice and safety, but that we can in fact have both. A majority of Michiganders understand that the policies that help all communities thrive also keep us safer. When asked what policies would help decrease crime “a lot” in the state, a majority of Michiganders said that “stopping the flow of drugs into the state” (54%) and “increasing funding for mental health and drug treatment” (52%) would be effective. Other reform minded policies, such as “fully funding the things that prevent crime, such as affordable housing,” (50%) and “deploying trained specialists to respond to mental health crisis situations” (41%) outperform “tough” policies like “increasing funding for police departments” (38%).

3. The conventional wisdom that Democrats need to try and “out tough” their opposition when they are attacked on crime is wrong. Responding with a comprehensive message on crime and safety helps move critical voting blocs, including independent, young, and even white male voters.

Too often, when Democrats are put on the defense on crime, they attempt to “out tough” their opposition, doubling down on their support for law enforcement or other “tough on crime” measures. Vera Action tested whether this approach is more effective than a comprehensive message on safety when responding to a typical GOP attack. What we found is that overall, the “comprehensive” message performs better than the “tough” message, and it also moves key voting blocs in Michigan towards the Democratic candidate – including Independent voters, young voters, Detroit/Dearborn residents, and even white men – when both were compared to a GOP attack line.

COMPREHENSIVE: Democrats will make Michigan's communities safer, preventing crime before it happens by investing in schools, housing, and mental health and addiction programs. Addressing violent crime means getting illegal guns off the street, improving police response times and solving serious crime. Democrats support police who put their lives on the line but also hold them accountable for abuse. Unlike Republicans, who oppose programs that prevent crime and common-sense gun laws, Democrats have solutions that work to make every neighborhood safe.

TOUGH: Democrats will restore law and order to Michigan's communities. Addressing crime means getting illegal guns off the street, improving police response times and solving serious crime. Democrats will add more funding for police, crack down on violent criminals, and go after the worst offenders by imposing stricter sentences. Unlike Republicans, who talk a big game but oppose common-sense gun safety laws, Democrats know what works to be both tough and smart on crime.

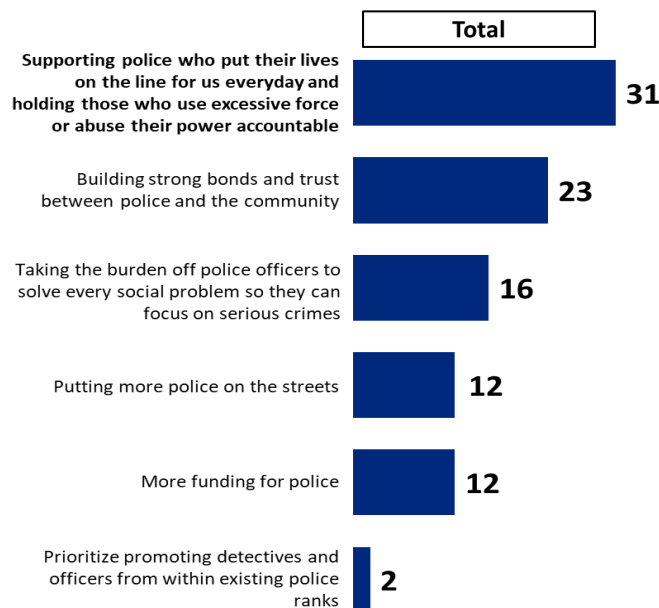
Thinking about the election for Michigan state legislature in November 2024, if the election were held today, for whom would you vote - the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate?

	OVERALL	IND	YOUNG	WHITE MEN	BLUE COLLAR
GOP ATTACK	45	40	37	55	41
DEM "SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY"	50	50	59	39	54
	+5	+10	+22	-16	+13

	OVERALL	IND	YOUNG	WHITE MEN	BLUE COLLAR
GOP ATTACK	48	53	43	62	48
DEM "ALSO TOUGH"	47	39	52	33	45
	-1	-14	+9	-29	-3

4. On policing, a message of support and accountability outperforms one of more funding or putting more officers on the ground.

Even on thorny topics like policing, the conventional wisdom that voters are looking for leaders to lean into “tough” rhetoric is wrong. 31 percent of Michiganders prefer an approach to policing that involves **“supporting the police who put their lives on the line for us everyday and holding those who use excessive force or abuse their power accountable,”** more than double the amount of voters who support “putting more police on the streets” (12%) or “more funding for police” (12%).



5. Michiganders, and especially Black Michiganders, understand that accountability is about repair and changing behavior, not just more punishment.

We know Michiganders care deeply about accountability, but too often we assume that translates into more support for tougher penalties or stricter sentencing. When you give Michiganders a choice, however, 54 percent believe that accountability is about a person “seeing the harm they’ve done, accepting the consequences, and changing their behavior,” compared to a smaller 43 percent who believe “if you do the crime, you should do the time, and that means serving the full sentence.” When you pull out just Black voters, that margin increases to 70-28. Even white voters, a group that leans more conservative, prefer the repair and behavior change approach by a 51-46 margin.

SAFETY & JUSTICE: Some say crime is out of control and, to make communities safe, people who break the law must be held accountable. This means seeing the harm they've done, accepting the consequences, learning from mistakes, and changing their behavior. Harsh punishment and long sentences alone lead to more violence. We need to provide people with programs that work to turn their lives around and prevent future crime.

DO THE CRIME, DO THE TIME: Others say crime is out of control, and we need to make sure that people who break the law are held accountable by enforcing strict punishments. If you do the crime, you should do the time, and that means serving the full sentence. Offenders shouldn't be able to get out of jail or prison early simply because they complete programs or have a good track record behind bars.

