

## Talker Call

# Countering Racialized Politics About Crime in 2024: Why ‘Serious About Safety’ Works Better Than ‘Tough on Crime’

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## Featured Panelists

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# Public Safety & Crime

## Theory of the Case

Our strategy centers what the majority of voters want to see in their communities: solutions that address the root causes of crime, in addition to investments in alternative first responders and social services. We've learned that people who care about public safety are increasingly receptive to comprehensive solutions that go beyond traditional law enforcement measures. By emphasizing community investment and support networks, we can engage diverse demographics and shift the conversation from fear to long term proactive solutions.

### ➤ **Community-Focused Funding**

Prioritize funding for community services emphasizing proactive long-term crime prevention, rather than focusing on only responding to short term fears.

### ➤ **Supporting Officers' Roles**

Discuss how funds directed to bolstering mental health resources and social service support networks allow police officers to focus on core duties.

### ➤ **Equitable Public Safety**

Advocate for a balanced approach that addresses crime prevention and accountability without sacrificing one for the other.

### ➤ **Engaging Minority Communities**

Mobilize Black and young voters by highlighting the importance of economic opportunities and meaningful criminal justice reform.

## Lessons from VA 2023 Election:

What do Voters Want When it Comes to Crime?  
Challenging 'Tough on Crime' with a 'Serious  
About Safety' Frame

# Methodology

## Universe

Virginia Voters

## Sample Size

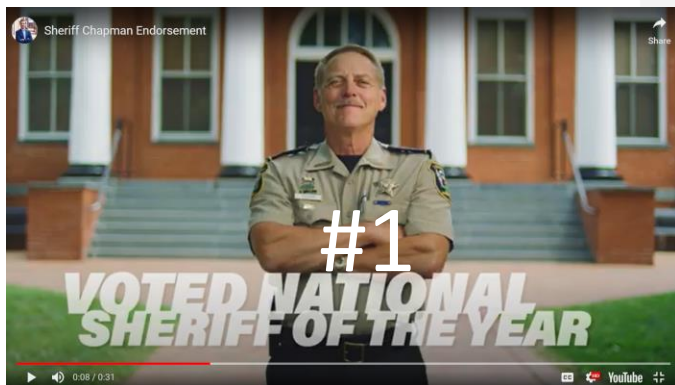
Total Base N= 1000

## Methodology

These findings are from a proprietary survey conducted by HIT Strategies on behalf of Vera Action. This survey consisted of N= 1000 Virginia registered primary voters and oversamples of N=75 Black registered voters and N=75 Independent voters. The survey was conducted via online panel. The survey fielded from November 16 – November 20, 2023. The margin of error is +/- 3.1%.

# Ad Test

## Ad #1 – Republican Juan Pablo Segura



- Endorsement from Loudoun County Sheriff Mike Chapman
- Fully funding police
- Backing law enforcement
- Holding people accountable

## Ad #2 – Democrat Nadarius Clark



- Supports law enforcement
- Gun safety advocate
- Assault weapons ban, universal background checks, law that stops domestic abusers from getting guns

## Ad #3 – Vera Mock Ad



- Democrats work to prevent crime before it happens, respond to crisis, and stop violence
- Promoting gun safety, treating addiction, mental health experts
- Supporting police to handle serious crimes



# Overview of the Ad Test

- Virginia is an **excellent off-year bellwether**, and in the 2023 cycle, the GOP spent over \$25 million on ads there attacking Democrats as "soft on crime."
- Respondents were shown three separate ads:
  - 1) one from a GOP candidate running in Loudoun County touting his "tough on crime" credentials (with a relatively restrained message, not the usual "blood on the streets" hyperbole that doesn't perform well outside of the GOP base);
  - 2) another from a Democratic candidate running in Hampton Roads touting his law enforcement endorsements and gun control measures; and, finally,
  - 3) a mock ad that Vera Action produced with a hypothetical Democratic candidate touting a comprehensive "serious about safety" platform about preventing crime, responding to crisis, and stopping violence.
- Overall, the actual Democratic ad and the Vera Action mock ad performed better at **addressing voter concerns** about crime compared to the GOP one (72% and 73%, compared to 65%, respectively).
- When asked which ad most aligned with their views, **34% selected the Vera Action mock ad**, compared to 26% of voters for the Democratic ad and only 23% of voters for the GOP ad. Importantly, the comprehensive **"serious about safety" message in the mock Vera Action ad especially resonated with Black voters and young voters** as coming closest to representing their views—47% of Black voters selected the Vera Action mock ad, and 48% of voters 18-24 also selected this ad.

## © Key Findings

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- 1** Democratic ads with a “serious about safety” message have the potential to motivate the communities that have been sitting out of elections at higher rates than usual – particularly Black voters and young voters.
- 2** Voters prefer a more comprehensive approach to crime and public safety, one which involves fully funding social services, common sense gun laws, and mental health responders in some situations currently handled by the police.
- 3** Voters start with tepid trust for both Republicans and Democrats when it comes to making change on public safety and end with higher levels of trust in Democrats after viewing public safety ads from both sides of the aisle, indicating an opportunity for Democrats to lead with a plan to address voters’ concerns and gain trust.
- 4** A comprehensive, “serious about safety” message resonates with and motivates voters more than tough-on-crime Republican ads. Voters particularly respond to a message about preventing crime before it occurs and providing mental health support for those in crisis.

# A 'SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY' MESSAGE RESONATES

Which ad is most aligned with your views?

#1



#2



#3



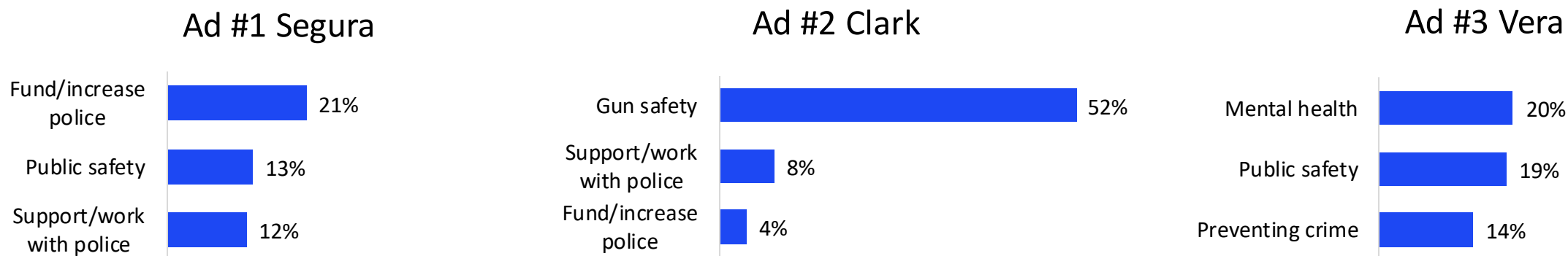
	AD #1	AD #2	AD #3
<b>OVERALL</b>	23%	26%	34%
<b>BLACK VOTERS</b>	6%	36%	47%
<b>LATINO VOTERS</b>	17%	37%	37%
<b>WHITE VOTERS</b>	27%	23%	31%
<b>GEN Z VOTERS</b>	13%	34%	47%
<b>BOOMERS</b>	25%	23%	27%
<b>DEMOCRATIC VOTERS</b>	7%	33%	54%
<b>REPUBLICAN VOTERS</b>	40%	18%	15%
<b>INDEPENDENT VOTERS</b>	21%	28%	29%



# Virginia voters preferred a more comprehensive approach to crime and public safety

- We asked Virginia voters what specific concerns each ad addressed regarding crime. For the Segura ad, voters’ responses mostly related to the candidates’ promise to fund police departments or work with them (21%), whereas in the Clark ad, voters overwhelmingly called out increased gun safety (52%).
- For the Vera ad, voters felt this addressed providing support for mental health (20%), having a plan for public safety (19%) and preventing crime before it happens (14%) when it comes to their concerns about crime. Since voters named multiple concerns addressed by this ad, this suggests that the Vera ad depicts a more thorough and nuanced approach to addressing public safety.
- We asked voters to indicate which ad most aligned with their views and the Vera ad tested the highest at 34%, suggesting voters want to see comprehensive public safety messaging from elected officials.

What concerns does this ad specifically address? [OPEN-END]



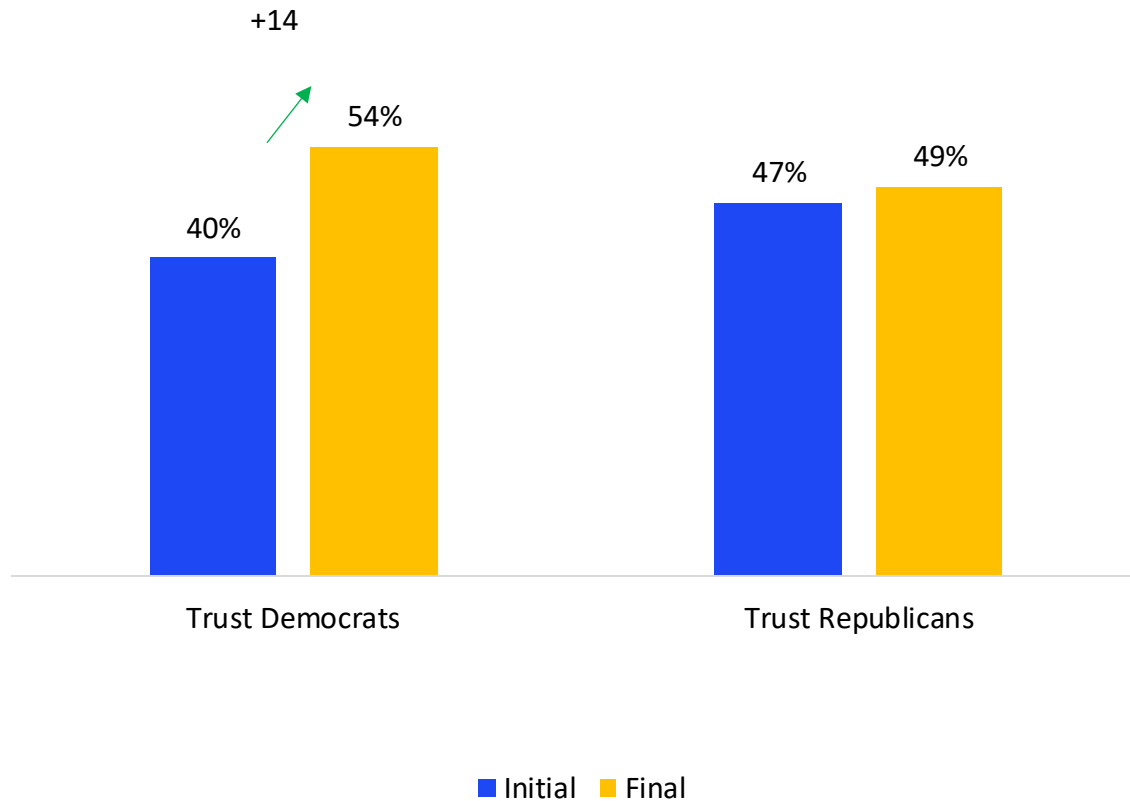
“This ad addresses the **importance of mental health crises**, which is extremely important when speaking about crime. In addition, the ad addresses gun safety and education which are very important to me.” Virginia voter, in response to mock Vera ad



“Mentions working with the police, shows people of all races and different walks of life, mentions mental health support, and **gives an actual plan of action**. Not just fear mongering.” – Virginia voter, in response to mock Vera ad.

# Comprehensive public safety messaging can increase voter trust

How much do you trust Republicans and Democrats when it comes to issues of crime and public safety?



- Virginia voters start with tepid trust for both **Republicans (47% trust)** and **Democrats (40% trust)** when it comes to making change on public safety.
- After viewing responses from both Democrats and Republicans on this subject, trust in Democrats increases by **14 points** to 54% trust, while only 49% trust Republicans.
- Trust of Democrats is higher among **women (60% trust)** and **Black voters (80% trust)**.
- **36%** of Virginia voters **shifted to more trust in Democrats** to make change on the issue of crime, while **24%** of voters **shifted to less trust in Republicans**.
- **Open end responses suggest that voters are desperate to hear any response or plan of action from Democrats on crime.**

# LEAN INTO CRIME, BUT MESSAGE MATTERS: HERE IS WHAT TO SAY

How do we prevent crime, respond to crisis, and stop violence?  
With safety, accountability, and justice.

**Safety matters.** We need to make communities safer with real solutions. We do that by investing in good schools, affordable housing, treatment for mental health and drug addiction, and well-paying jobs. Focusing police resources on solving the most serious cases and sending the right first responder to a crisis.

**Accountability matters.** We need more accountability at all levels. The criminal justice system needs to be more accountable for public safety and fairness. We need to hold people accountable when they violate the law by fostering repair and changing their behavior. And we need accountability when elected officials spend billions on things that don't work.

**Justice matters.** People don't want to choose between safety and justice—we want both. We can support police who put their lives on the line everyday but hold them accountable if they abuse their power or break the law.

## © Conclusion

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### **1 Democrats CAN and SHOULD emphasize two key dimensions of public safety that are embraced by majority of voters nationally:**

1. Invest in solutions that address the root causes of crime
2. Invest in alternative first responders so police can focus on crime rather than being overburdened with the jobs society has neglected (ex. addiction counseling & mental health care)

### **2 It's about a comprehensive approach and investment in resources for long term prevention, while still tackling short term issues.**

The short-term issue is where the fear mongering pulls our persuasion audience away from us and makes democrats so vulnerable to attack ads on crime, so we need to address how this also helps us in the short-term while still promoting long-term solutions.

### **3 Voters are looking for candidates and electeds that have a proactive stance and plan on public safety, running with a comprehensive approach and serious about 'safety message' can inoculate against GOP attack ads and increase voter trust, especially amongst key audiences on crime – Black and young voters.**

## Future Research Recommendations:

- Understanding how this messaging tests with voters across battleground states.
- Finding more clarity on voter's perceptions on who is responsible for change in public safety.
- How to go even further in addressing short term fears when connecting with long term policy goals.

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## About

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HIT is the leading Millennial & Minority-owned public opinion research firm in Washington, DC that approaches research different than most conventional research firms:



The HIT Team lives and works at the intersection of society where the most disruptive change is happening.



HIT employs conventional research methods such as polling and focus groups with innovative techniques like social media listening to fully represent the diverse attitudes of diverse communities



HIT is a fully integrated member of your team that will ensure data driven strategy is integrated throughout your operation.

**HIT SERVICES:** 🎯 HIT Research 🎯 HIT Analytics 🎯 HIT Messaging

### HIT RESEARCH AUDIENCES



Black Americans



LGBTQ+



Latinx



Millennials



Asian & Pacific



Gen Z



Islander Women

## Why choose HIT as your research partner?

Trailblazing organizations choose HIT because they recognize people are more than a mere data point – they are seeking genuine insights into real people to achieve real and actionable outcomes.

People of color, young people, women, LGBTQIA2S+, and other underserved communities are shaping our future. Our team isn't just studying these communities – we are integral parts of them with similar identities and lived experiences. This unique blend allows us to develop culturally nuanced insights, strategies, and messages that resonate on a deeper level.

## What does a HIT research engagement equip you to do?

- Enable your organization to better understand the shifting priorities and attitudes of **diverse audiences** on the issues that shape public opinion as they happen.
- Build research rigor within your organization by equipping your team with **proven messages** that engage, activate, and mobilize your audience.
- Our diverse team integrates **cultural competency** into your communication and marketing materials to ensure it reaches and connects with the audience you need to activate whether that be at the front door, online, and in mailboxes across and throughout diverse, unique communities.





# HIT Services

Quantitative	Qualitative
Traditional Live Phone Polls	Online Focus Groups
Member-Driven Panels	Live Focus Groups
Text-to-Web Polls	Online Chat Group
Social Media Polls	Online Journal (Boards)
Public Panels	In-Depth Interviews
Content Testing	Rapid Message Testing

## How to get in touch with HIT Strategies

Every community requires a unique approach, HIT Strategies can ensure your strategies, messages, and programs truly resonate with the audiences you serve.

- To learn more about how HIT can equip your team with the highly insightful and targeted research you need, contact us at [sales@hitstrat.com](mailto:sales@hitstrat.com)
- Follow us on social media
  -  [@HITStrat](https://twitter.com/HITStrat)
  -  [HITStrategies](https://www.linkedin.com/company/HITStrategies)

## Future Talker Calls

Abortion & Reproductive Rights	June 2024
Young Voters	August 2024
Black Voters	September 2024

If you would like to receive invitations for future Talker Calls, [click here](#).

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Thank You!