

TAKING BACK THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM CONVERSATION

Effectively Communicating About Crime, Public Safety, and Reform

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IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

Lisel Petis, Senior Fellow, R Street Institute

R STREET INSTITUTE

R Street Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy research and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government.



Know Your Audience

- Identify the audience
- Know their background
- What do they care about?
- Are there any “triggers”?



Build Trust

- Be aware of your mindset
- Explain why you are a credible source
- Find commonality
- Be honest and sincere
- Be willing to concede some things

THE VOICE OF REASON SINCE THE BEGINNING

TODAY
IS THE
DAY

The Daily Times

YOU
CAN
RELAX

FAKE NEWS

DON'T READ ALL ABOUT IT. STOP. USE REASON.
IT'S ALL SENSATIONALISM. CHECK YOUR SOURCES AND DO YOUR HOMEWORK BEFORE YOU BELIEVE OR REACT.

Combat Misinformation

- Anticipate the concerns
- Listen, listen, listen
- Validate, don't just dismiss concerns
- Be prepared with qualitative evidence
- Be prepared with quantitative evidence



Present Compelling Messaging

- Listen first
- Reflect important values
- Example for R Street:
 - Increase public safety
 - Save taxpayer dollars
 - Support law enforcement
- Proactively address potential concerns

MESSAGING TO THE PUBLIC ON CRIME AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Rachael Eisenberg, Senior Director, Center for American Progress

CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

The Center for American Progress is an independent, nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.

Purpose

- Share public opinion research on crime and public safety messaging conducted by CAP Action and polling partners
- Offer guidance to policymakers on effective messaging that supports criminal justice reforms and avoids backsliding
- Direct participants to research on criminal justice reform and gun violence prevention that reinforces messaging guidance
- Support efforts to improve public education on issues of crime, public safety, and criminal justice

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH



Methodology



In partnership with **CAP Action**, **Impact Research** and **Hart Research** have each conducted nationwide online polls and **Global Strategy Group** conducted two online discussion boards.



1. The Impact poll included N=1218 registered voters with an oversample of N=381 Black, Latino and AAPI voters.
2. The discussion boards included two groups of white, Black, and Latino voters: Urban/Suburban respondents and Small Town/Rural voters.
3. The first Hart Research poll was 616 BG state voters; 591 BG district voters; and 722 Black, Latino, and AAPI voters.
4. The second Hart Research poll was 1,565 voters with an oversample of 454 people of color



The Impact poll was conducted from April 6th to 13th

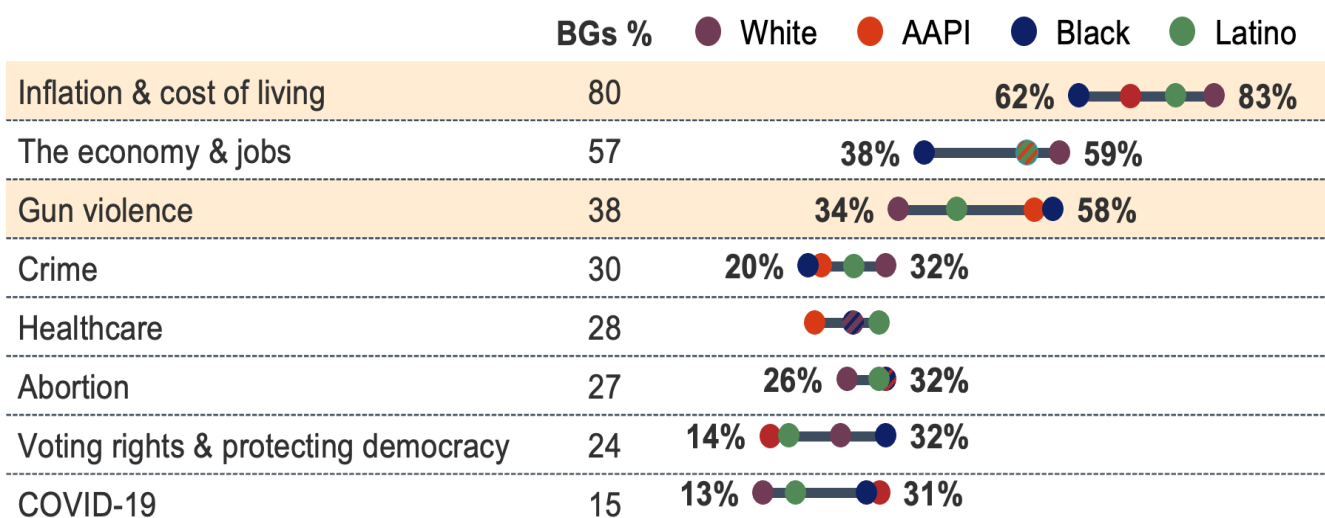
The GSG discussion boards were conducted from June 14th to 16th

Hart surveys were conducted July 15-25 and August 24-28

Economic concerns are the most salient issues, but gun violence is also high on the list, especially for respondents of color.

Below is a list of some possible issues that elected officials could prioritize.

Please indicate which three should be the most important issues for elected officials to address.



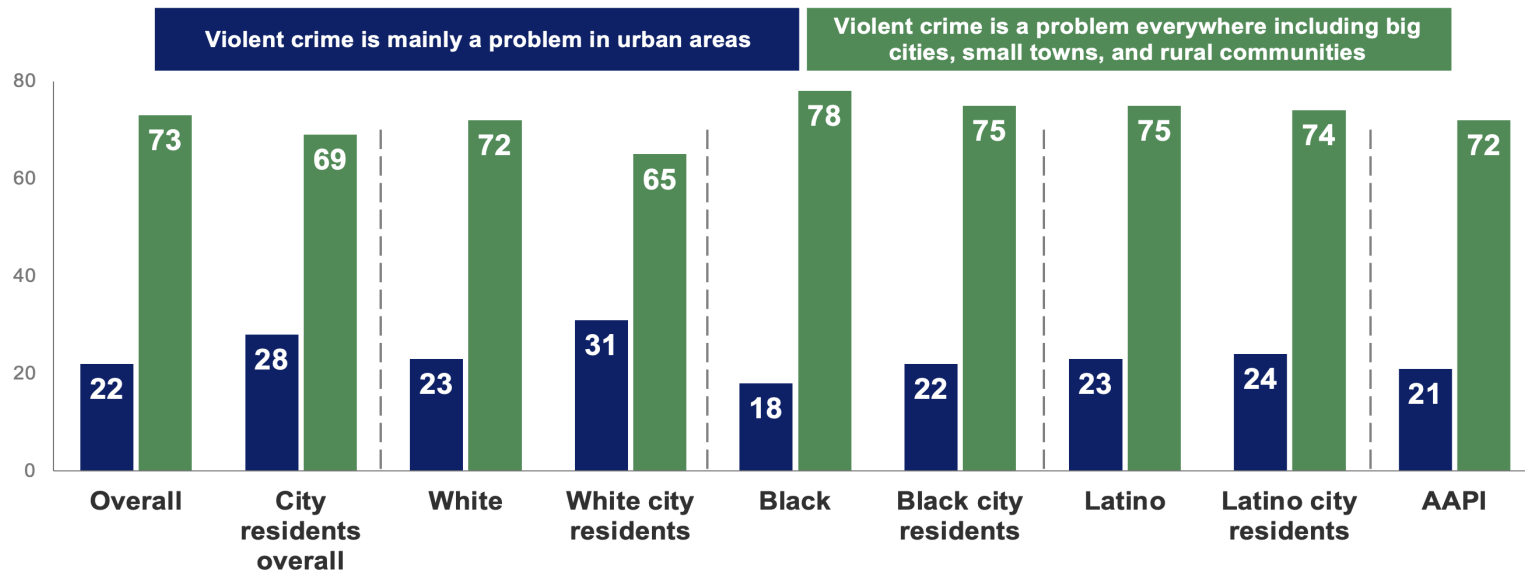
Gun violence as a top 3 issue %

Men 18-49	34
Men 50+	35
Women 18-49	47
Women 50+	38
Urban	48
Suburban	37
Small town/rural	33
Democrats	57
Independents	39
Republicans	21

Regardless of race or whether they actually live in an urban area, respondents think violent crime is a problem *everywhere*.

No one views this as a “city problem.”

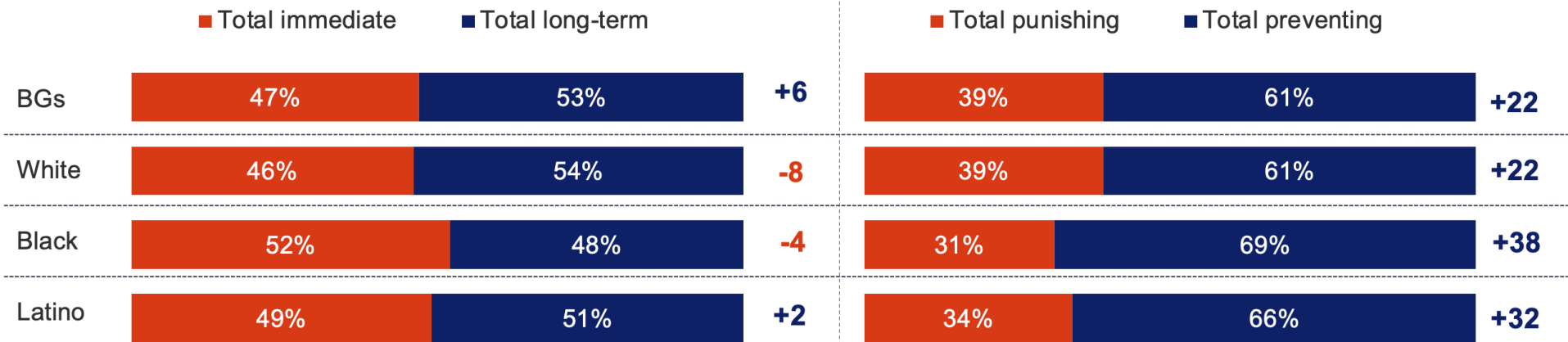
Which of the following statements comes closer to your own view when it comes to crime, even if neither is exactly right?



Respondents are split about prioritizing immediate vs. long-term solutions, yet three-in-five prioritize prevention over punishment.

When it comes to addressing crime and keeping people safe, which of the following is more important: **Immediate solutions** to address violent crime or **long-term solutions** that address the root causes of violent crime?

When it comes to addressing crime and keeping people safe, which of the following is more important: **Punishing** people who have already committed violent crimes or **preventing** people from committing violent crimes in the future?



Respondents believe issues like poverty, mental health, and drug use are the most important drivers of crime.

Respondents see causes of crime as: **Poverty/economy, drug use, and mental health challenges**



“Poverty, economic disparity...”

– Urban/Suburban, Male, Black,
NY

“But where I see most crimes and activities happening on a regular basis are where **homelessness** is allowed to start encampments and crime seems to spread from those areas... **most regularly because of drug addiction.**”

– Urban/Suburban, Male,
Latino, CA

“Mental health, **there are so many people not properly being treated for mental health issues**, which I feel is one of the most important things driving crime in communities.”

– Small Town/Rural, Female,
White, IL

Violent crimes that respondents are concerned about include **gun violence, robbery, and homicide**

“The types of violent crime in my area that concern me the most are **armed robbery and gun violence.**”

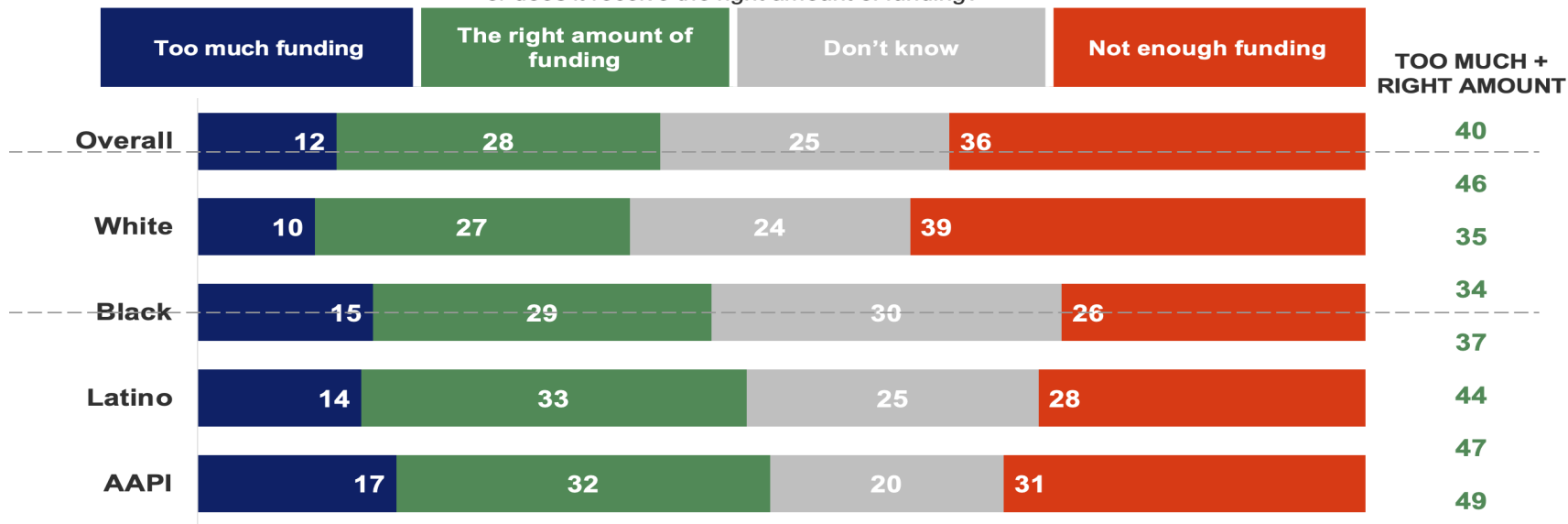
– Urban/Suburban, Female, Latino, PA

“**Murder, robbery and assault** concern me the most. The **number of robberies has really been on the rise** in both residential and commercial places.” – Urban/Suburban, Female, Black, GA

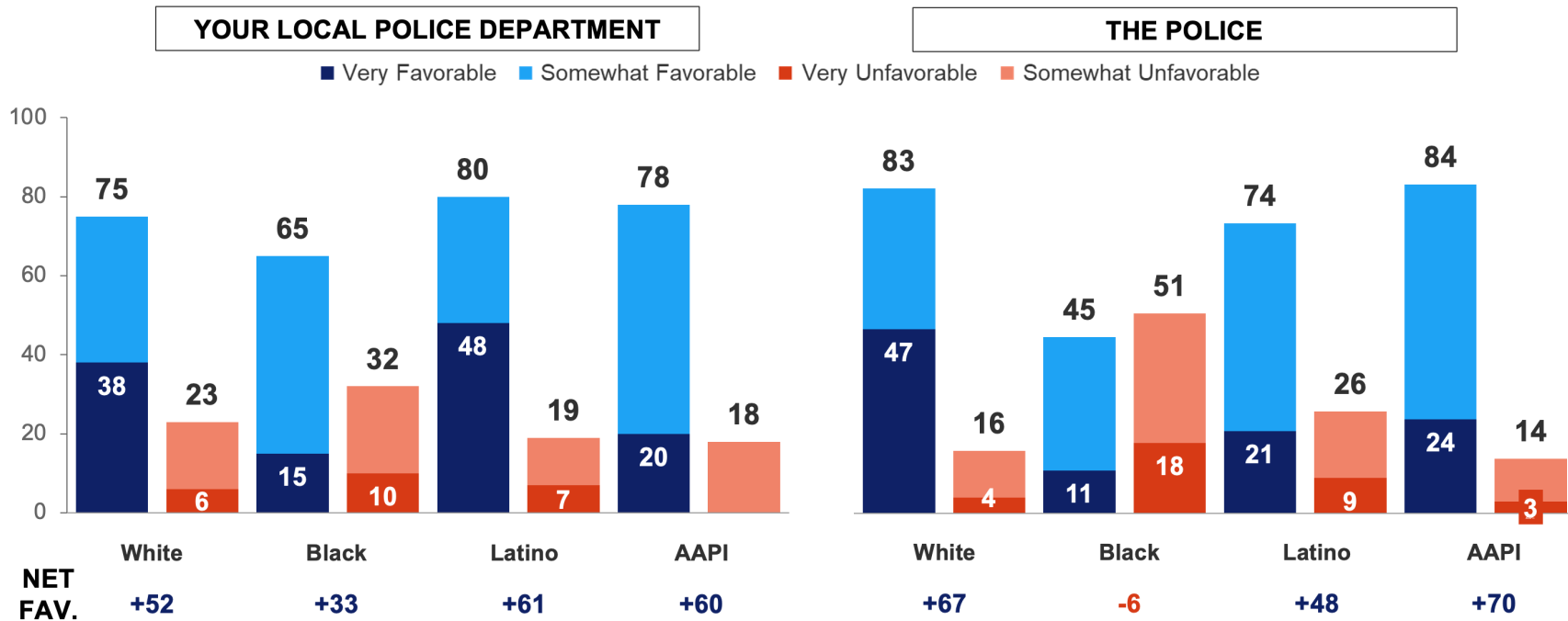
Just 36% of respondents think there isn't currently enough police funding but one in four aren't sure.

- For every subgroup except for white respondents, more think there is already an adequate level of police funding.

And from what you know, does the police department where you live receive too much funding, not enough funding or does it receive the right amount of funding?










75% of respondents overall support their local police department, and 77% of respondents overall support the police generally.



The accountability and prevention message is in step with respondents' views across all groups.

	All voters %	White %	Black %	Latino %
Holding people accountable when they commit crimes and doing <u>everything</u> we can to prevent them	78	81	71	76
Preventing crime, not just responding after it happens	76	77	72	70
Being strong on responding to crime and smart on addressing the root causes of crime	76	79	68	73
Stopping violence now and preventing crime in the future	76	78	72	70
Using every tool in our toolbox to stop crime and keep communities safe	72	73	66	69

A resounding majority of respondents believe gun reform proposals would reduce crime a lot, including stronger background checks, red flag laws, etc.

<i>Would greatly help reduce gun violence</i>	All battleground voters	Black %	Latino %	Gun confidence movers%
Strengthening background checks for gun purchases	 71%	79	82	82
Allow police/family to petition a judge to remove guns from a person at risk for violent behavior	 71%	75	81	68
Cracking down on the manufacturing, sale, and distribution of illegal guns	 68%	79	76	91
Banning assault weapons and other weapons of war	 63%	74	71	76
Requiring a waiting period before purchasing guns	 59%	69	69	71
Raising the minimum legal age to buy any gun to 21 years old	 54%	65	66	52
Requiring a license to carry a concealed handgun	 53%	63	62	70

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

Three Steps to Effective Messaging on Crime

Meet People Where They Are	Emphasize the Importance of Accountability AND Prevention	Going on Offense – Guns and the Increase in Violent Crime
Acknowledge that people's fears on crime are real ; Do not try to talk people out of it or tell them they are wrong to think this way.	Affirm your commitment to accountability for people who commit violent crimes as well as your respect for local police departments . You need show support for the police in their efforts to respond to violent crime, and to hold police accountable when there is misconduct.	People increasingly see gun violence as a huge problem in our society, we need to put blame for crime squarely on weakened gun laws that are making communities less safe.
Show empathy by recognizing the importance of this problem and your shared values on the issue . We want people to feel they are hearing their concerns.	Once you show people that you take accountability seriously, you should focus on a suite of solutions that will help prevent crime and stop it before it occurs . Policy solutions are popular, but people want to hear how they will positively impact their communities now.	How you talk about it matters. You must emphasize the impact that weak gun laws have on communities , not just opposition to common sense reforms.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Everyone-no matter where they live-has a right to be safe from crime and violence.” • “Everyone deserves to feel safe in their communities, and we need to do everything in our power to stop the violence.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hold people who commit crimes accountable for their actions” • “Ensure local police departments have the support they need to keep us safe” • “Invest in improving mental health and substance use disorder treatment” • “Invest in new crime prevention programs showing success now” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Extreme laws have been passed that make it easier for people to get guns who should not have them” • “Even after mass shootings, policies have been passed to weaken gun laws against the opposition of law enforcement”

Criminal Justice policy solutions are popular, but talk about both immediate and long-term solutions



Community-Based Violence Prevention

“Grow partnerships with community that interrupt cycles of violence happening now”

“We need to invest in community solutions that stop the violence happening now and address the root causes over the long term.”



Mental Health and Substance Use Services

“Ensure that trained healthcare workers are available to respond to people experiencing a crisis or emergency”

“Invest in improving mental health and substance use disorder treatment”



Long-Term Solutions

“We cannot arrest or incarcerate our way to greater safety”

“Invest in what creates safe communities in the first place: good schools, living wage jobs, and affordable housing”

SUPPORTIVE RESEARCH

Research Defending Criminal Justice Reform

Bail Reform	Community Violence Intervention	Comprehensive Public Safety	Other CJ Reforms
Don't Blame Bail Reform for Gun Violence	FAQ on Community Violence Intervention Programs	City Efforts to Slow Violent Crime	FORTHCOMING: ARPA Funds Support Alternative Crisis Response
Primer on US Cash Bail Systems	CVI: Proven Strategies to Reduce Violent Crime	American Rescue Plan has Helped Governments Invest in Community Safety	FORTHCOMING: Progressive Prosecutors
Bail Reform is Not a Threat to Public Safety	Community-Based Violence Interruption Can Reduce Violence		FORTHCOMING: Parole and Early Release
FORTHCOMING: 5 Ways Cash Bail Undermines Community Safety	Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs Reduce Violence and Save Money		
	FORTHCOMING: Community-Based Interventions for Youth Make Everyone Safer		

Research Making a Proactive Case on Guns

Gun Violence and Rising Crime	Impact of Gun Violence	Gun Laws	Other GVP
Recent Rise in Crime is Driven by Gun Violence	Gun Violence is Having a Devastating Impact on Young People	Weak Gun Laws are Hurting Police Officers	Media Coverage Often Ignores Gun as the Main Driver of Recent Rise in Violent Crime
The Gun Trafficking Crisis is Fueling Violent Crime	Gun Violence Disproportionately and Overwhelmingly Hurts Communities of Color	Weak Gun Laws are Driving Increases in Violent Crime	Debunking Myths the Gun Lobby Perpetuates Following Mass Shootings
	FORTHCOMING: Gun Violence in Rural America	FORTHCOMING: Weakening Requirements to Carry a Concealed Firearm Increases Violent Crime	Guns are Fueling the Rise in Domestic Extremist Violence Across the Country
	FORTHCOMING: Violence Against Women		
	FORTHCOMING: Disproportionate Impact of Violent Crime on the Latino Community		

The Data Case & Future Messaging Work

Attack	Response
Defund the Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Police have an important role to play in solving crime and addressing case backlogs but have to spend far more of their time addressing low-level incidents that take them away from those core duties.- We cannot continue to ask police to solve every issue in society- to be social workers, nurses and case managers all at once.- Developing programs ensure that health care professionals can respond to people in crisis, and neighborhood mediators can deescalate conflict.
Progressive Prosecutors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Attacks on progressive prosecutors for causing rising crime rates are unfounded.- Data from cities across the country show no connection between the policies of progressive prosecutors and changes in violent crime rates.- Policies of progressive prosecutors to reduce the footprint of the criminal legal system focus on ensuring access to justice and reducing mass incarceration. These efforts are not linked to crime rates.
Bail Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- There is no evidence linking bail reform to rising violent crime rates.- In places where bail reform has been implemented, research shows that rearrest rates have remained consistent both before and after reform.- When changes are made to our unjust cash bail system, more people stay connected to their families, homes, jobs, and whole communities' benefit.

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE TO SHAPE THE NARRATIVE

Perry Sacks, Managing Account Supervisor, M+R

M+R STRATEGIC SERVICES

M+R is a full-service communications consulting firm that works exclusively with nonprofits and foundations to amplify issues, raise money, create political change and inspire people from all walks of life to engage in the world around them.

We work with SJC grantees to provide strategic communications counsel and hands-on support to tell the stories of local justice system reform to the media and other key audiences.

Why is it important to shape the public narrative?

- If we never play offense, **we'll always be on defense.**
- **Risk losing momentum or backsliding** with support for reform.
- Proactively and consistently speaking with press **ensures reporters have trusted experts and those with lived experience to turn to as sources.**
- Don't trust that people will understand information on their own -- **make sure you're providing context and sharing stories of impact.**

When should you proactively communicate with press?

- **Consistently!**
- **Use announcements or anniversaries** of new local reform initiatives to educate press about what's new and **remind them of the other good work underway.**
- **The release of new data or research** serves as a strong moment to provide context, offer experts, and answer questions -- this way you're **getting ahead of misinformation and arming your stakeholders with data to back up messaging.**
- News stories that get something wrong - or right - are good opportunities to **reach out to reporters to build relationships for the long-term.**
- Don't reserve outreach for good news only. Getting ahead of or pushing back on misinformation means **we also need to be talking to press when the news is tougher.**

What can this communication look like?

- Proactive tactics
 - **Local roundtables for key reporters** with system actors and community members to educate them on the issues, seed future coverage, and build relationships
 - Lift-up the **personal stories** of how reforms have helped people in the community (to help shine a light on the positive stories & impact)
 - **Op-eds** by justice system actors and community voices about what public safety should look like
 - Emails and meetings with **newspaper editorial boards** to walk them through new data or research and provide needed context
 - **Social media content** explaining & re-setting the perceptions around justice reform with data and stories (look at SJC social media pages for inspiration!). Social media is also a great place to thank reporters who get it right!

SJC EXCHANGE

Communities ▾ Events ▾ Resources ▾ Blogs Our Network ▾ About ▾

Crime Narrative Resource Library

Resources / Crime Narrative Resource Library

The SJC Crime Narrative Resource Library is intended as a clearinghouse for resources (e.g., reports, data, select earned media, communications materials etc.) that push back on the current tough-on-crime narrative and correct misinformation around crime, public safety, and justice reform. SJC sites, Strategic Allies, and others should consider the resources included here as tools to support your communications efforts. If you have any questions about how to use these resources or would like support in thinking through how to push back on the tough-on-crime narrative in your community, please reach out to TeamSJC@mrss.com. Please use the linked submission form to suggest additional resources to be added to the library.

SUGGEST A RESOURCE

What can this communication look like?

- Reactive tactics
 - **Letters-to-the-editor** correcting misinformation or incomplete takeaways
 - **Email responses to reporters** suggesting there is more to the story based and offering additional data and/or lived experience (bonus: you'll position yourself as an expert for their future coverage!)
- Keep in mind: Don't over-dwell on opposition who are not going to change or be persuaded by us. Concentrate your energy on news outlets that can be persuaded + can see reason & evidence.

***Note:** The team at M+R is available to help you explore these any of these tactics further and/or discuss other ideas!*

What this looks like in practice: Pima County

- What: County officials, local law enforcement, behavioral health specialists, and people with lived experience organized (with assistance from M+R) a **briefing event aimed at educating local press and community members about the county's arrest deflection program.**
- Why: SJC research partner Justice System Partners (JSP) released **new research** examining the impact of Pima County's deflection program and recommendations for the future. *AND* there was a need to **counter negative news coverage** of reform and crime with positive stories and new expert sources for reporters
- The result: **More than 60 local reporters and community members** joined the virtual event and engaged in a lively Q&A with system stakeholders. Local news outlets previewed the event and reported positively on the deflection program.

Arrest deflection helps thousands in Pima County seek treatment

By Mary Glen Hatcher mhatcher@gvnews.com Aug 24, 2022



Lt. Erika Stropka, a founder of the Mental Health Support Team at the Tucson Police Department, speaks about the county's arrest deflection program during a panel discussion Aug. 18.

Pima County



Pima County, Tucson Police to host public discussion to mitigate arrests

Questions?

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SafetyAndJusticeChallenge.org