



PUBLIC OPINION
STRATEGIES

turning questions into answers

Shelby County Crime Commission



Key Findings from a survey
of 450 voters in
Shelby County, TN.
July 26-28, 2020



Methodology

Public Opinion Strategies presents the key findings from a survey of 450 registered voters in Shelby County, Tennessee. The survey was conducted July 26-28, 2020 via landline and cell phones and has a margin of error of $\pm 4.6\%$.

The table on the following page provides a demographic breakdown of the sample.

Demographic Breakdown of Sample.

Demographic		All of Shelby County (100%)	City of Memphis (65%)
RACE			
	African-American	46%	53%
	White	48%	40%
	Other/Refused	6%	7%
GENDER			
	Female	60%	59%
	Male	40%	41%
AGE			
	18-44	42%	38%
	45-64	38%	39%
	65+	20%	23%

Key Findings



Key Findings

#1

As you might expect, the pandemic dominates the issue agenda with nearly four-in-ten (38%) county voters naming it as their top priority for government leaders to address. The pandemic is the top priority for both men (40%) and women (37%), in the city of Memphis (44%) and the suburbs (28%), and with both white voters (30%) and African-Americans (47%).

Crime and public safety (19%) is the top next-tier priority followed closely by education (17%) and jobs and the economy (16%). Just 3% of county voters name “police reform” as their top issue priority.



Key Findings

#1

(cont'd)

While public safety is not the top issue priority, Shelby County voters strongly endorse expanding additional resources for public safety. Hiring more police officers is very popular with county voters (78% support / 57% strongly support). Every subgroup of voters overwhelmingly supports hiring more officers.

In addition, 63% of voters – including majorities of every subgroup -- agrees with the statement, “**Local law enforcement does not have all the tools it needs to effectively fight crime.**”

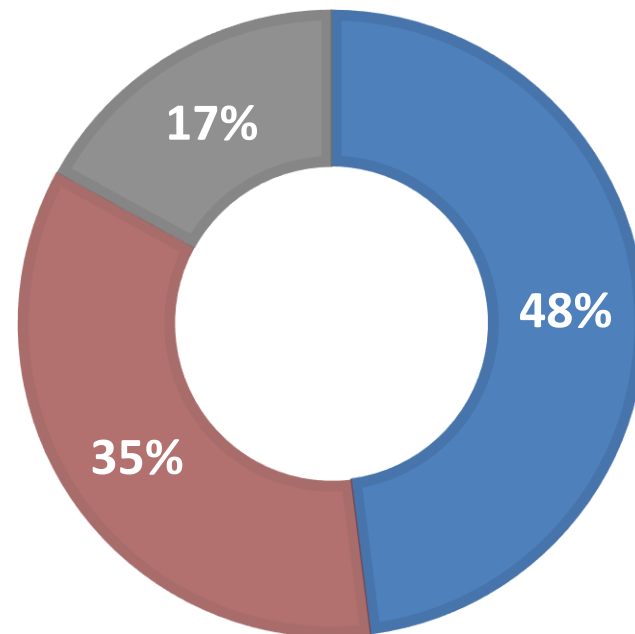
Voters are mixed on the county's direction.

First, generally speaking, do you think things in Shelby County are moving in the right direction or are they pretty seriously off on the wrong track?

48% Right Direction

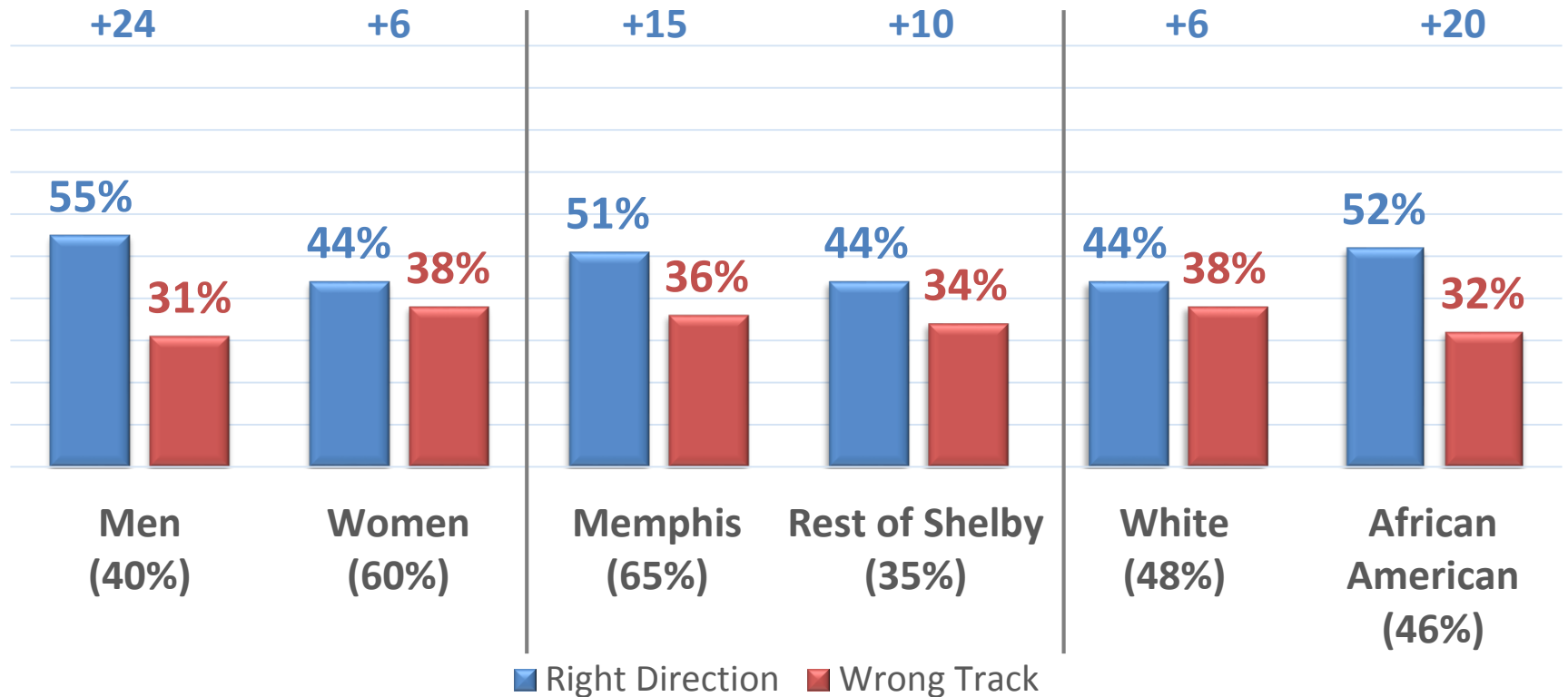
35% Wrong Track

- Right Direction
- Wrong Track
- Don't Know/Refused



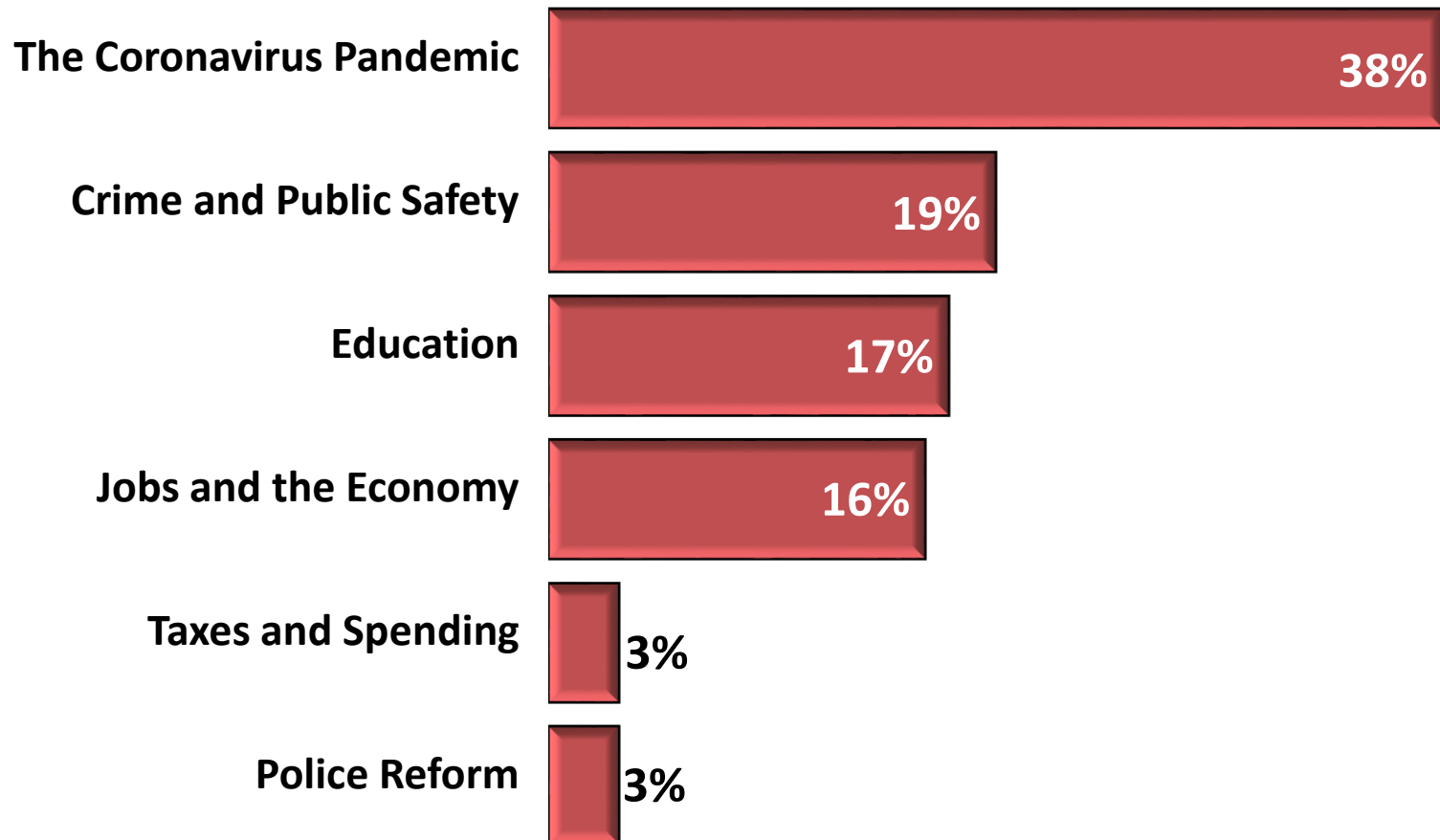
The mood is a net positive across key subgroups.

COUNTY MOOD BY SUBGROUP



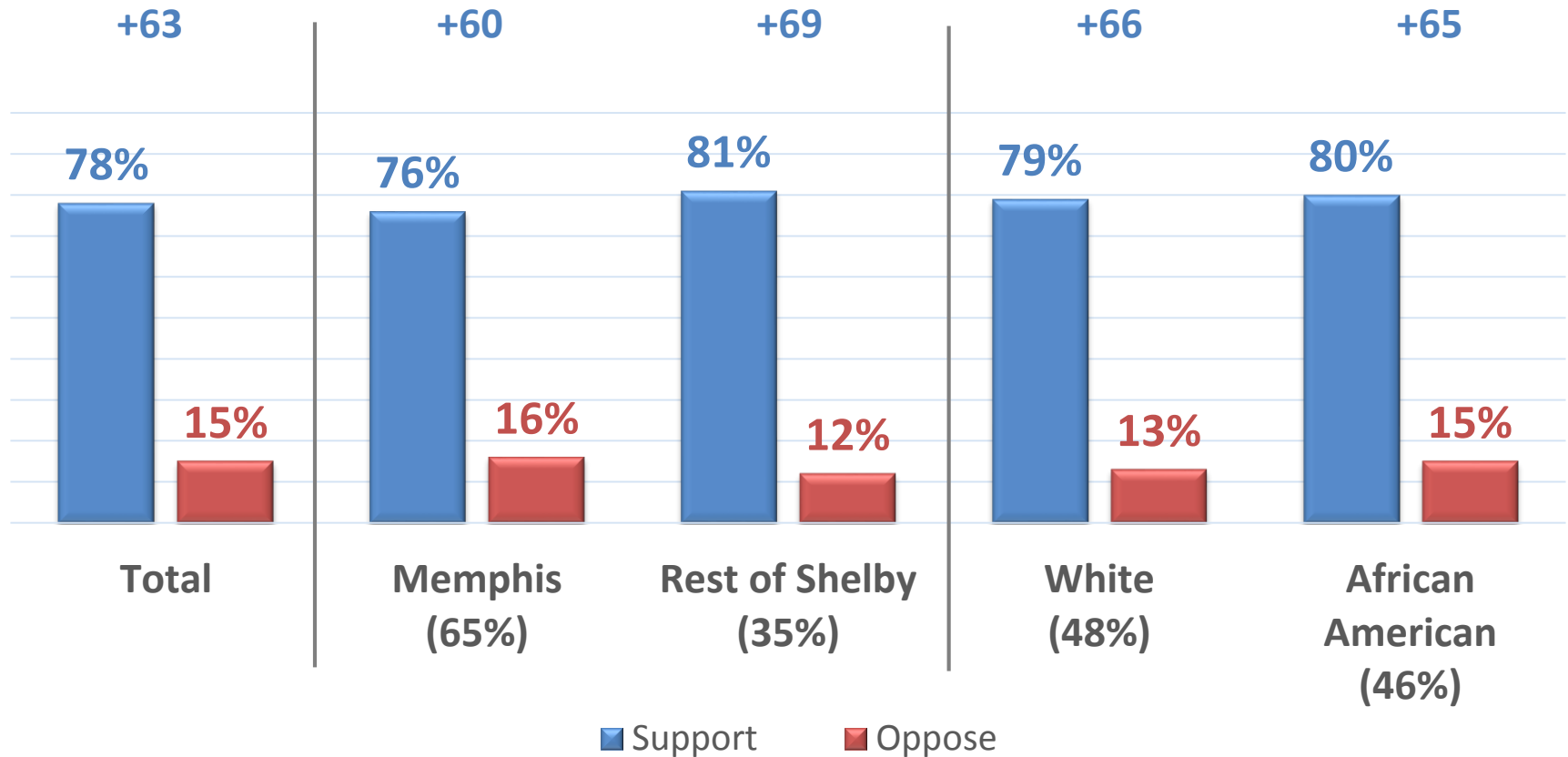
The pandemic dominates the issue agenda.

Next, which ONE of the following issues do you believe should be the top priority for government leaders? Is it....



Hiring more police officers is very popular.

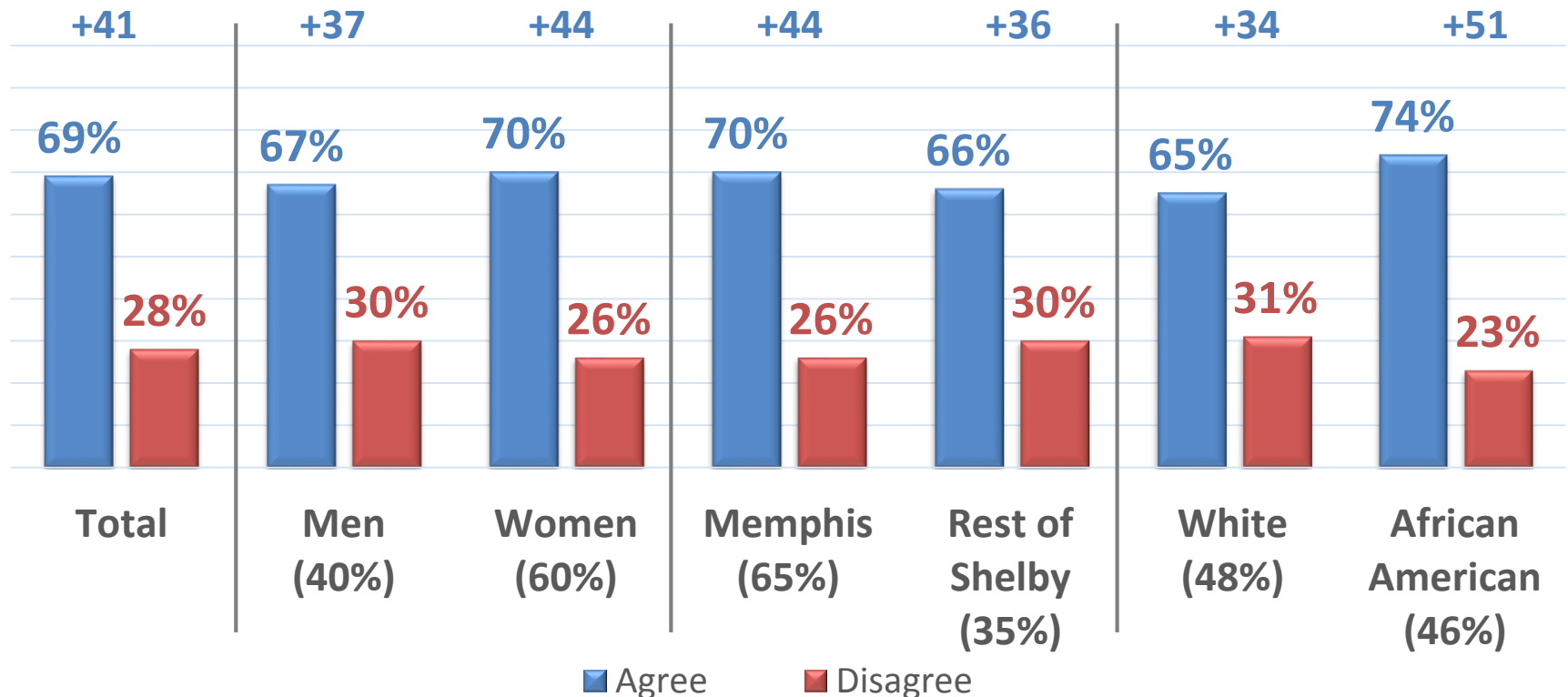
And, would you support or oppose hiring more police officers?



Every major subgroup supports more police in their neighborhood.

AGREE or DISAGREE:

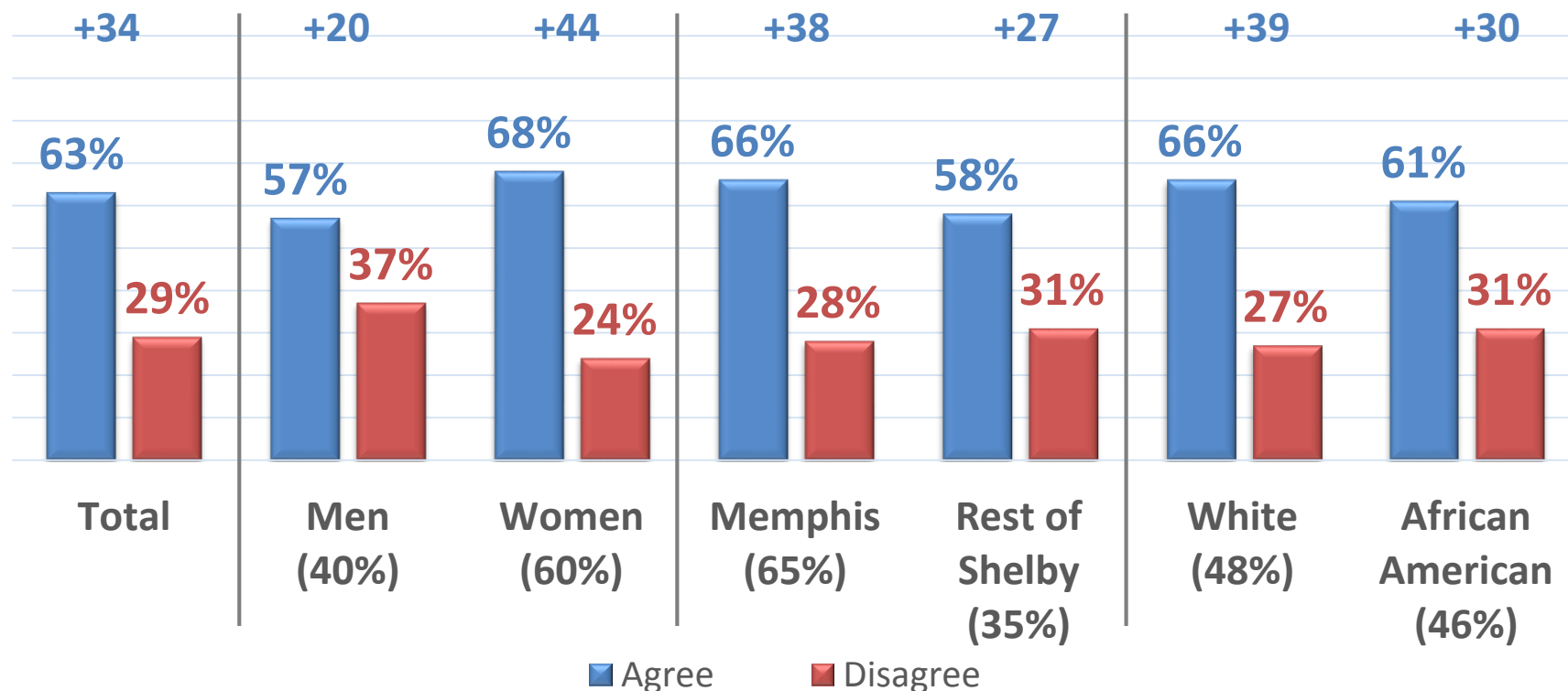
I would like an increased local law enforcement presence in my neighborhood.



Voters agree: law enforcement needs more resources.

AGREE or DISAGREE:

Local law enforcement does not have all the tools it needs to effectively fight crime.





Key Findings

#2

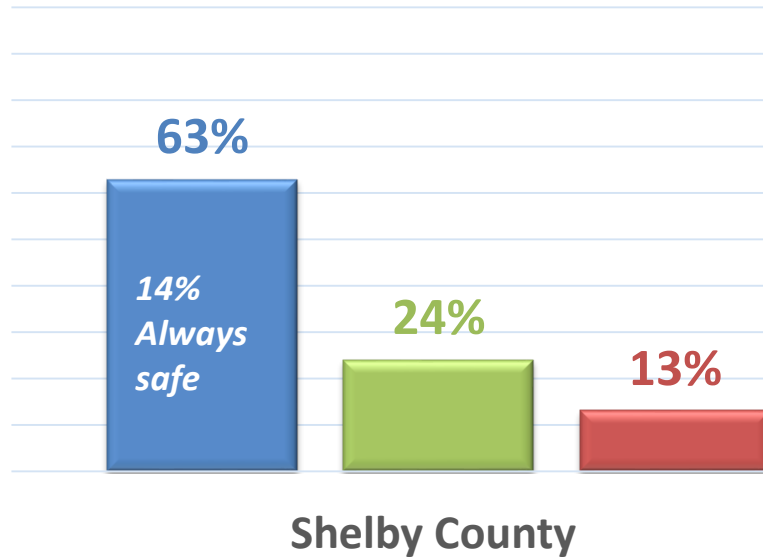
Shelby County residents feel safe from crime in both the county overall (63%) and while in their own neighborhood (76%).

Just 13% of voters say they feel “unsafe” in the county and only 7% of voters feel “unsafe” in their neighborhood.

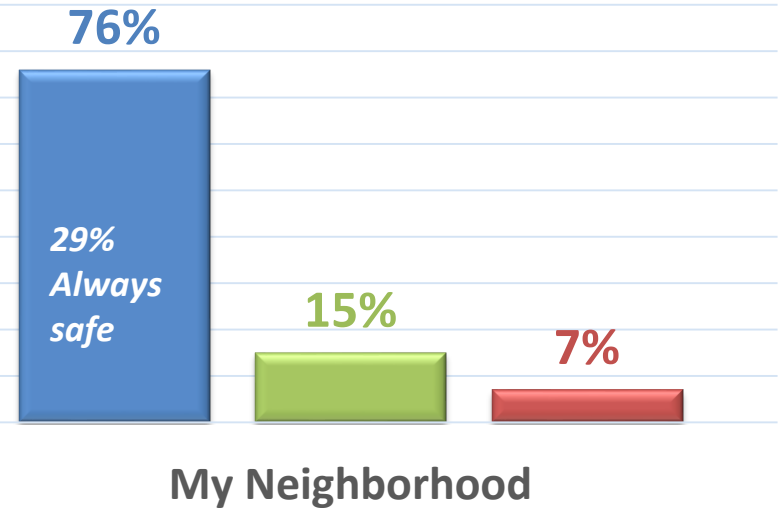
The sense of personal safety is shared across all demographic and geographic subgroups; indeed, no subgroup feels more unsafe than safe in either the whole county or in their own neighborhood.

Voters feel safe from crime...

First, thinking about Shelby County overall, which one of the following best describes your feelings about your safety from crime?



And, how about your neighborhood? Which one of the following best describes your feelings about your safety from crime in your neighborhood?



■ Total Safe ■ Safe half the time ■ Total Unsafe

The sentiment cuts across all subgroups.

Subgroup	Shelby County (Safe-Unsafe)	My Neighborhood (Safe-Unsafe)
Men (40%)	66%-12%	85%-3%
Women (60%)	60%-13%	71%-10%
Memphis (65%)	63%-11%	78%-6%
Rest of Shelby (35%)	61%-15%	74%-9%
White (48%)	65%-10%	78%-7%
African American (46%)	61%-13%	74%-7%
Non-College (37%)	59%-15%	71%-7%
College+ (57%)	71%-8%	88%-3%

Key Findings

#3

County voters overwhelmingly approve of the job performance of their local police departments. Local police departments receive a very positive job performance rating from voters: 71% excellent/good – 27% fair/poor. In every subgroup, more voters believe the local police are doing an “excellent” job than a “poor” job.

With the positive job performance ratings for local police, it is not surprising that Shelby County voters near unanimously agree with the statements, “**I respect my local law enforcement**” (95%) and “**My friends and neighbors generally respect local law enforcement**” (92%).

Local police receive a positive job rating.

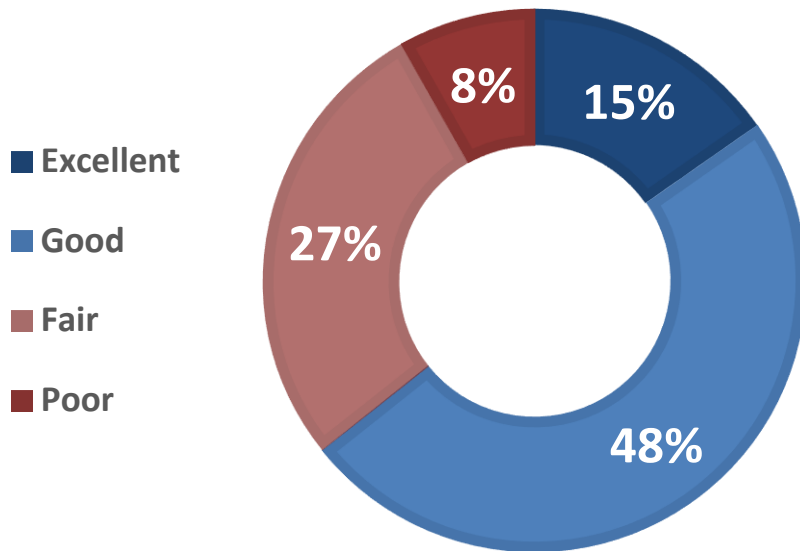
Now, how would you rate the job your local police are doing in your neighborhood? Are the local police doing ... an excellent, good, only fair or poor...job?

All Shelby County Voters

71% TOTAL Excellent/Good
27% TOTAL Fair/Poor

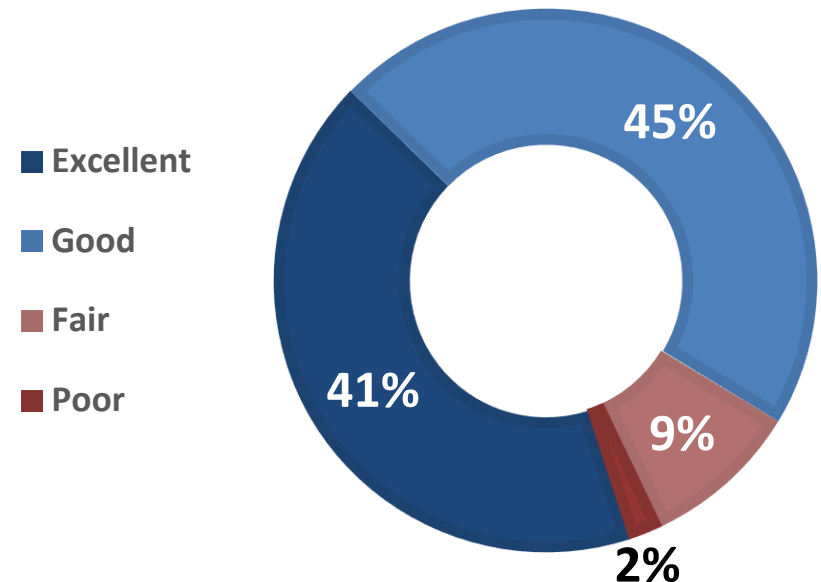
Memphis (65%)

62% TOTAL Excellent/Good
35% TOTAL Fair/Poor



Rest of Shelby (35%)

87% TOTAL Excellent/Good
11% TOTAL Fair/Poor



White voters are more positive than African-Americans.

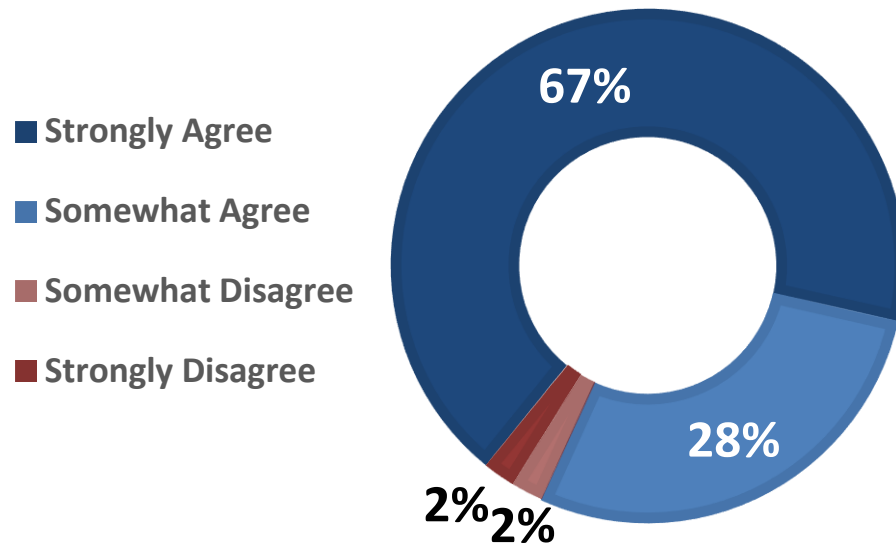
Subgroup	Local Police Job Rating (Excel/Good- Fair/Poor)	Local Police Job Rating (Excellent%- Poor%)
Men	71% - 26%	27% - 7%
Women	71% - 27%	22% - 5%
Memphis	62% - 35%	15% - 8%
Rest Shelby	87% - 11%	41% - 2%
African-American	56% - 39%	13% - 10%
White	85% - 15%	31% - 2%

Law enforcement is overwhelmingly respected.

AGREE or DISAGREE:

I respect my local law enforcement.

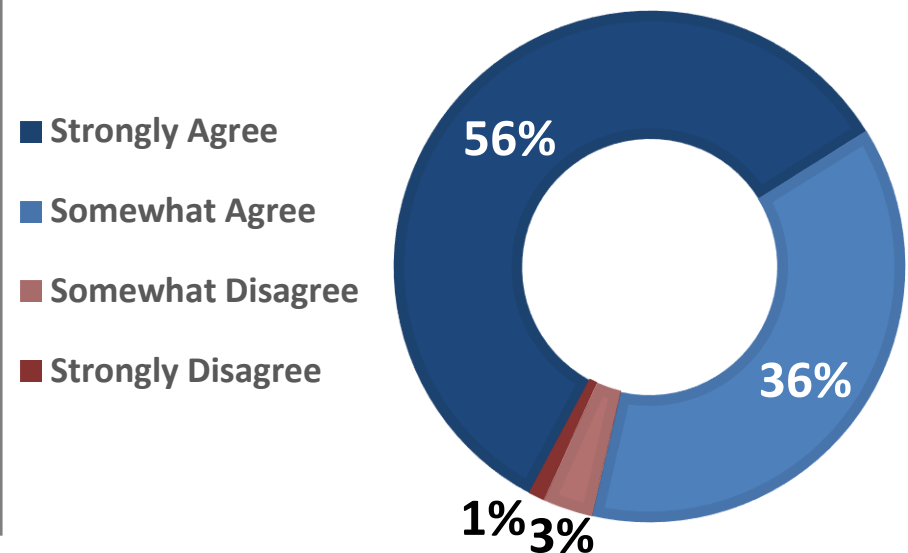
95% TOTAL Agree
4% Disagree



AGREE or DISAGREE:

My friends and neighbors generally respect local law enforcement.

92% TOTAL Agree
3% Disagree

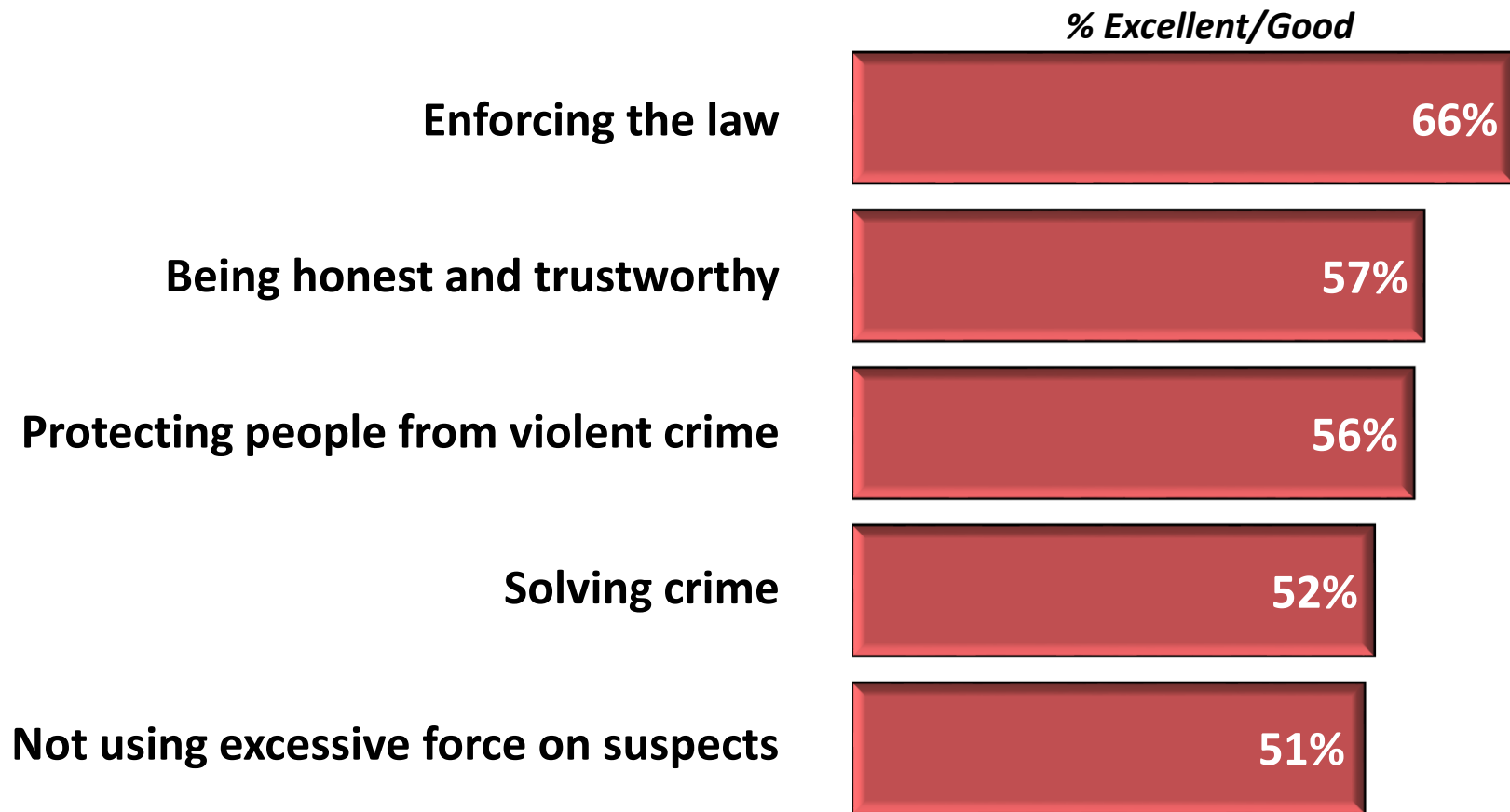


It is a near consensus opinion across all subgroups.

Subgroup (Agree-Disagree)	<i>I respect my local law enforcement.</i>	<i>My friends and neighbors generally respect local law enforcement.</i>
Men	95% - 5%	92% - 5%
Women	95% - 3%	93% - 2%
Memphis	94% - 4%	91% - 5%
Rest County	96% - 3%	95% - 1%
African-American	93% - 5%	89% - 5%
White	98% - 2%	97% - 2%

On the individual issues, local police receive positive ratings.

Next, please rate the job your local police are doing on each of the following issues:



Key Findings

#4

There is a significant racial gap on outlook toward the local police department. On the overall job rating, both white voters and African-Americans give the police a positive rating, but white voters (85%) are much more positive than African-American voters (56%).

In addition to the overall rating, we asked voters to rate their local police's performance on five separate issue areas. The specific issue approval rating generated differences by race ranging from 26 to 32 points.

Key Findings

#4

(cont'd)

Consistently, two-thirds or more of white voters rated the local police department positively on the separate issues.

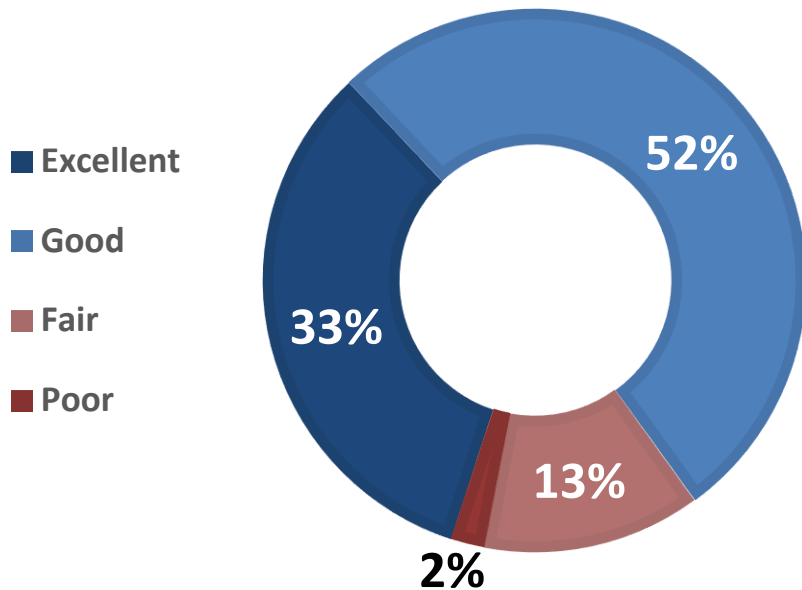
Among African-American voters, fewer than half of voters gave the local police department a positive rating on four of the five issues including on “**being honest and trustworthy**,” (45%), “**protecting people from violent crime**” (43%) and “**not using excessive force on suspects**” (36%).

There is a wide racial gap on overall job approval for local police

Now, how would you rate the job your local police are doing in your neighborhood? Are the local police doing ... an excellent, good, only fair or poor...job?

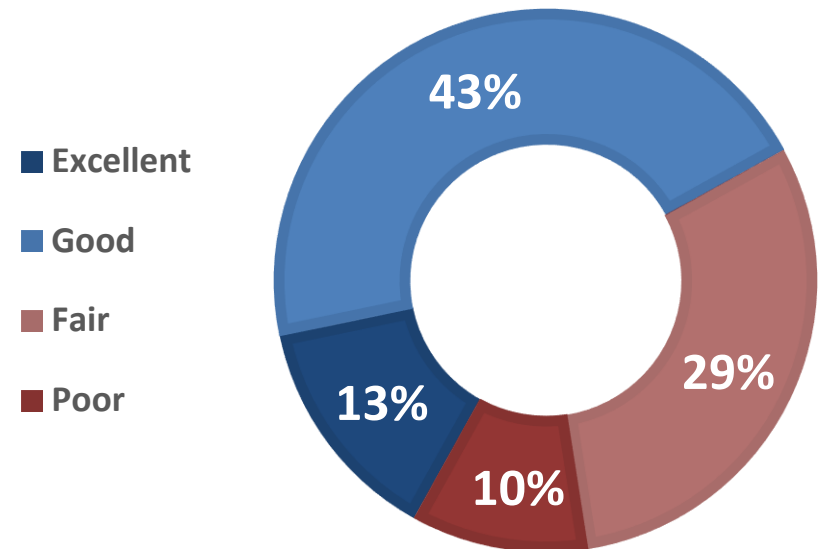
White (48%)

85% TOTAL Excellent/Good
15% TOTAL Fair/Poor



African American (46%)

56% TOTAL Excellent/Good
39% TOTAL Fair/Poor



...and on law enforcement's performance on specific issues.

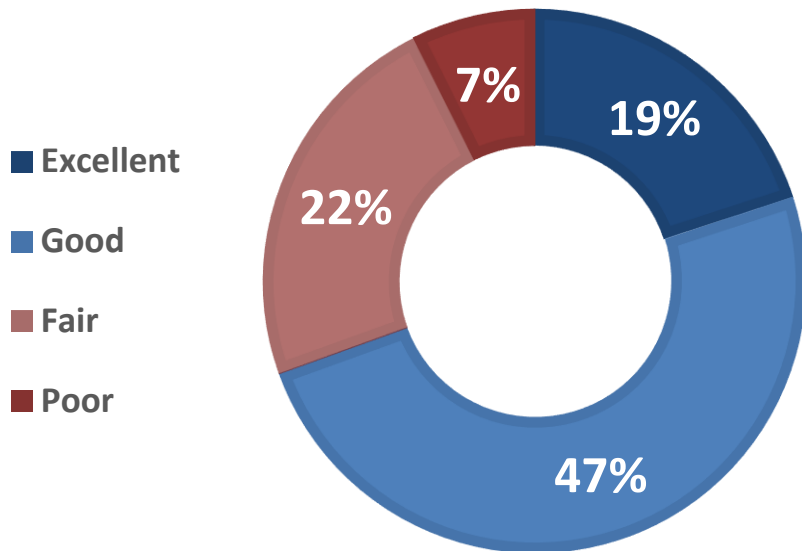
Subgroup	% Excellent/Good-Fair/Poor	
	White	African American
Enforcing the law	82%-16%	50%-43%
Being honest and trustworthy	71%-25%	45%-46%
Protecting people from violent crime	70%-28%	43%-50%
Solving crime	68%-27%	37%-55%
Not using excessive force on suspects	66%-28%	36%-54%

Local police receive their strongest rating on “enforcing the law”

Next, please rate the job your local police are doing on each of the following issues:

Enforcing the law

66% TOTAL Excellent/Good
29% TOTAL Fair/Poor



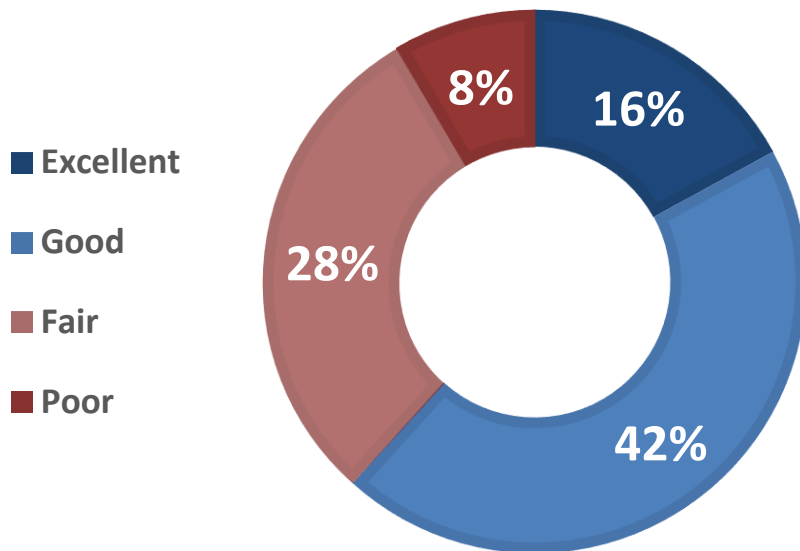
Subgroup	% Excellent/Good-Poor/Fair
Men (40%)	65%-31%
Women (60%)	66%-28%
Memphis (65%)	59%-36%
Rest of Shelby (35%)	80%-17%
White (48%)	82%-16%
African American (46%)	50%-43%
GOP (17%)	90%-10%
Ind (31%)	67%-28%
Dem (46%)	55%-40%
Non-College (37%)	58%-36%
College+ (57%)	68%-28%

Less than half of African-Americans rate local police as “honest and trustworthy.”

Next, please rate the job your local police are doing on each of the following issues:

Being honest and trustworthy

57% TOTAL Excellent/Good
36% TOTAL Fair/Poor



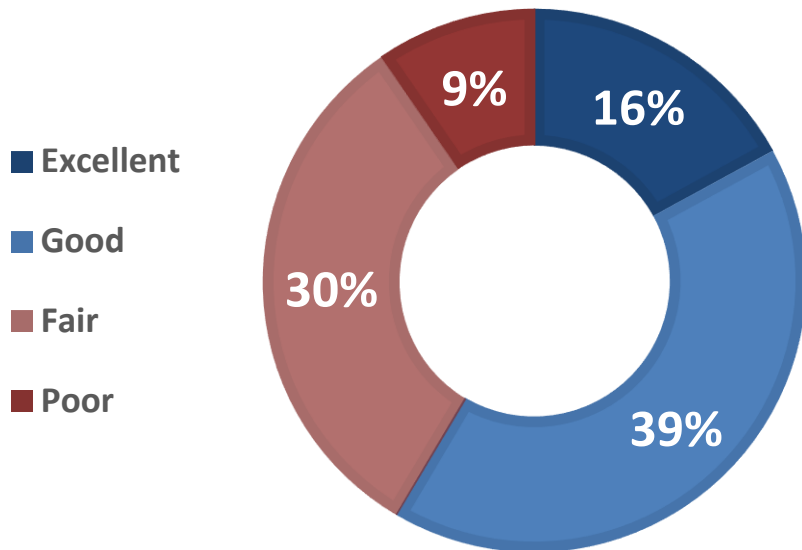
Subgroup	% Excellent/Good-Poor/Fair
Men (40%)	57%-37%
Women (60%)	58%-35%
Memphis (65%)	52%-41%
Rest of Shelby (35%)	67%-27%
White (48%)	71%-25%
African American (46%)	45%-46%
GOP (17%)	91%-8%
Ind (31%)	52%-39%
Dem (46%)	47%-47%
Non-College (37%)	55%-38%
College+ (57%)	59%-34%

White voters are more positive on the local police's performance on violent crime protection.

Next, please rate the job your local police are doing on each of the following issues:

Protecting people from violent crime

56% TOTAL Excellent/Good
39% TOTAL Fair/Poor



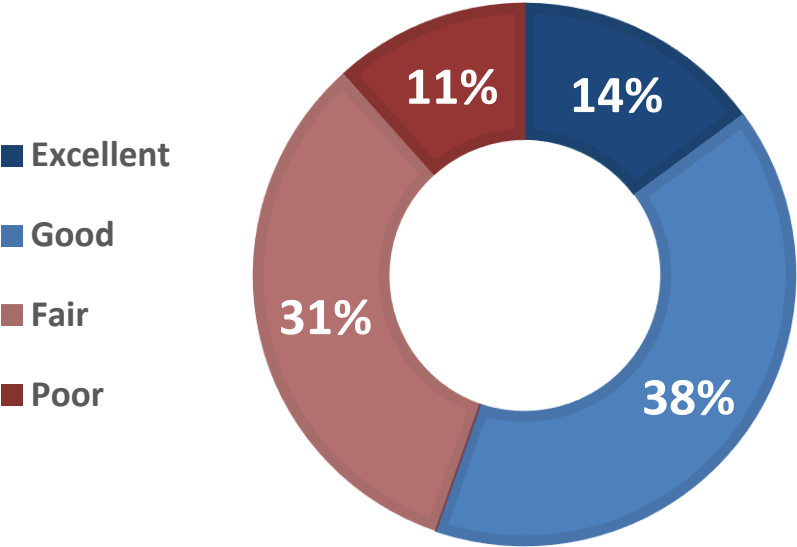
Subgroup	% Excellent/Good-Poor/Fair
Men (40%)	58%-36%
Women (60%)	54%-42%
Memphis (65%)	52%-43%
Rest of Shelby (35%)	62%-33%
White (48%)	70%-28%
African American (46%)	43%-50%
GOP (17%)	91%-9%
Ind (31%)	55%-40%
Dem (46%)	48%-45%
Non-College (37%)	52%-41%
College+ (57%)	60%-37%

A slim majority of voters give local police a passing grade on solving crime.

Next, please rate the job your local police are doing on each of the following issues:

Solving crime

52% TOTAL Excellent/Good
41% TOTAL Fair/Poor



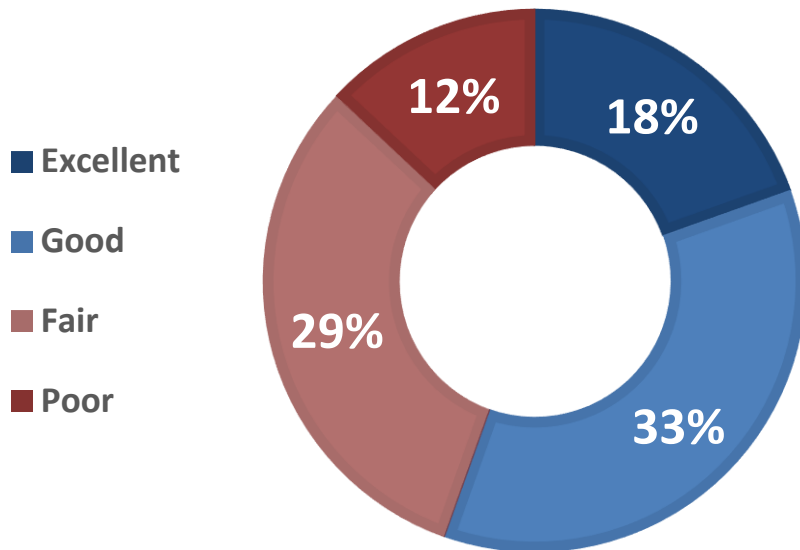
Subgroup	% Excellent/Good-Poor/Fair
Men (40%)	55%-40%
Women (60%)	50%-42%
Memphis (65%)	48%-47%
Rest of Shelby (35%)	60%-32%
White (48%)	68%-27%
African American (46%)	37%-55%
GOP (17%)	79%-18%
Ind (31%)	51%-39%
Dem (46%)	47%-48%
Non-College (37%)	48%-45%
College+ (57%)	55%-38%

There is a wide racial gap on excessive force use.

Next, please rate the job your local police are doing on each of the following issues:

Not using excessive force on suspects

51% TOTAL Excellent/Good
41% TOTAL Fair/Poor

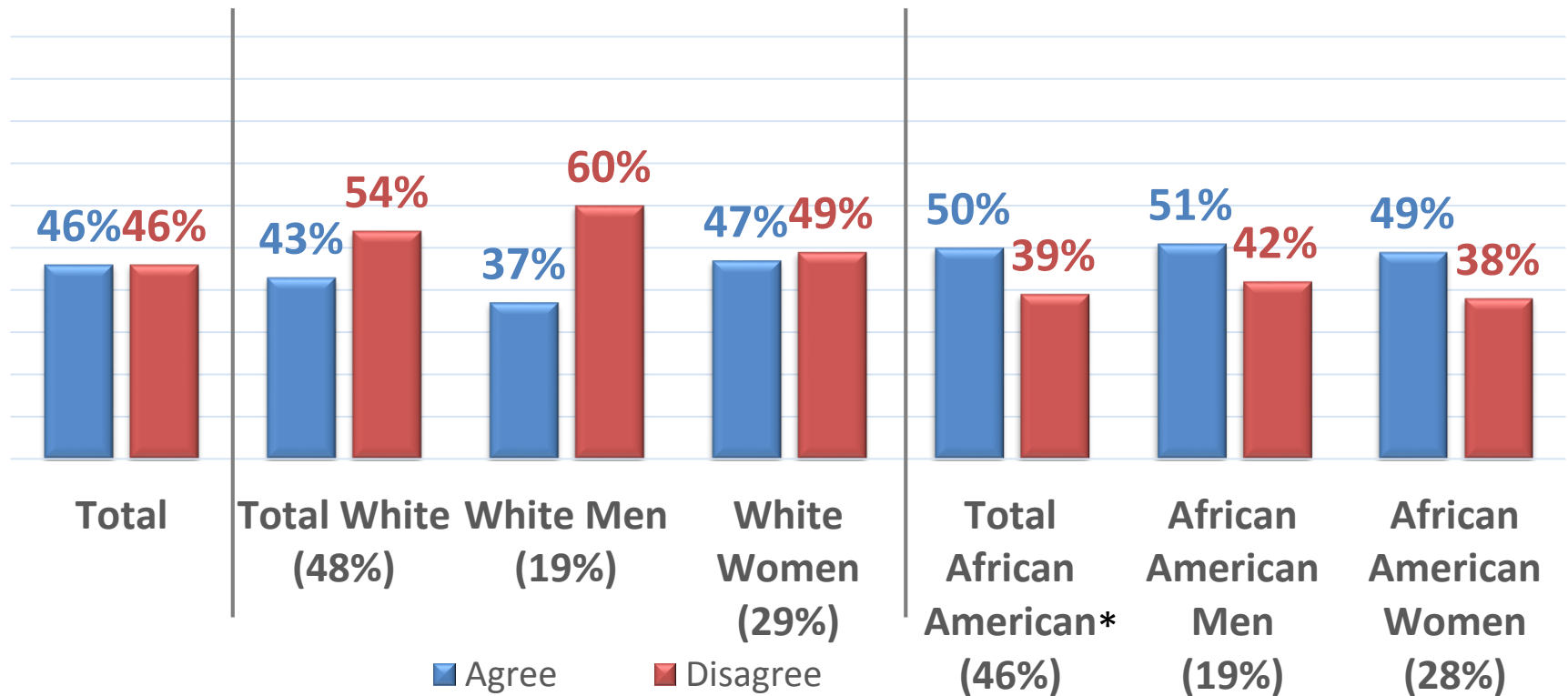


Subgroup	% Excellent/Good-Poor/Fair
Men (40%)	55%-38%
Women (60%)	48%-43%
Memphis (65%)	44%-47%
Rest of Shelby (35%)	63%-31%
White (48%)	66%-28%
African American (46%)	36%-54%
GOP (17%)	86%-13%
Ind (31%)	57%-34%
Dem (46%)	37%-53%
Non-College (37%)	45%-47%
College+ (57%)	55%-36%

Framed another way, voters are split on law enforcement's use of excessive force.

AGREE or DISAGREE:

Local law enforcement officers use excessive force too often.



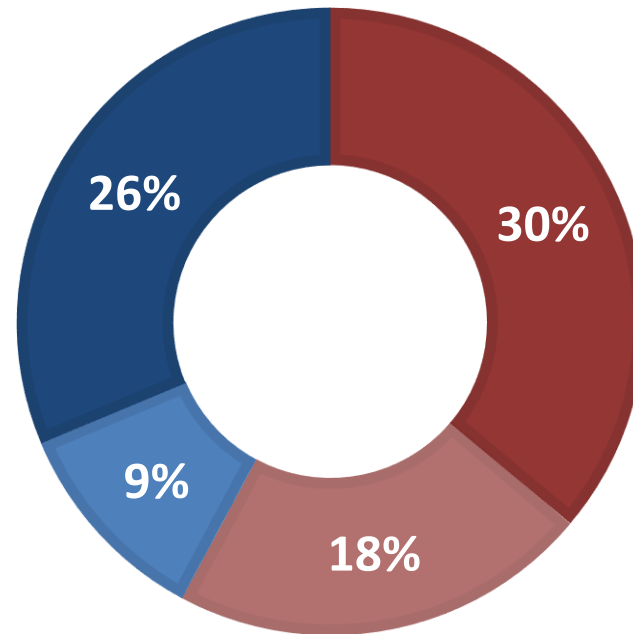
** Total numbers differ due to rounding*

On the official ballot, a plurality of Memphis voters support the referendum.

Shall the Charter of the City of Memphis, Tennessee be amended to create a new employee classification to include commissioned officers and employees in training to be commissioned officers within the Division of Police Services and state certified specified personnel and employees in training to be state certified specified personal within the Division of Fire Services to exempt from the residency provisions of the Memphis City Charter and allowed to reside in any neighboring county or within 50 miles from the City of Memphis limits?

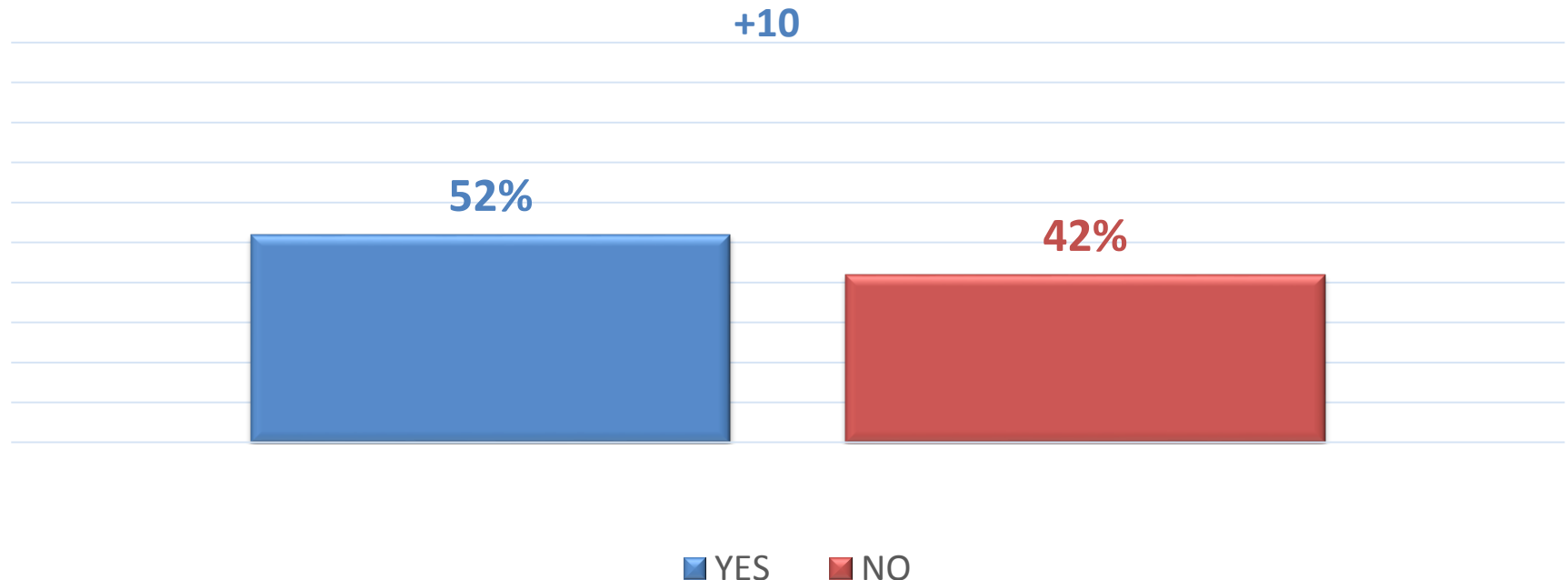
48% TOTAL YES
35% TOTAL NO

- Definitely Yes
- Probably Yes
- Probably No
- Definitely No



The Yes vote crosses the 50% threshold when voters are read a “plain language” version of the ballot.

In other words, would you vote YES, in favor or NO, against a measure to allow Memphis police officers and firefighters to live outside the city within 50 miles of the city limits



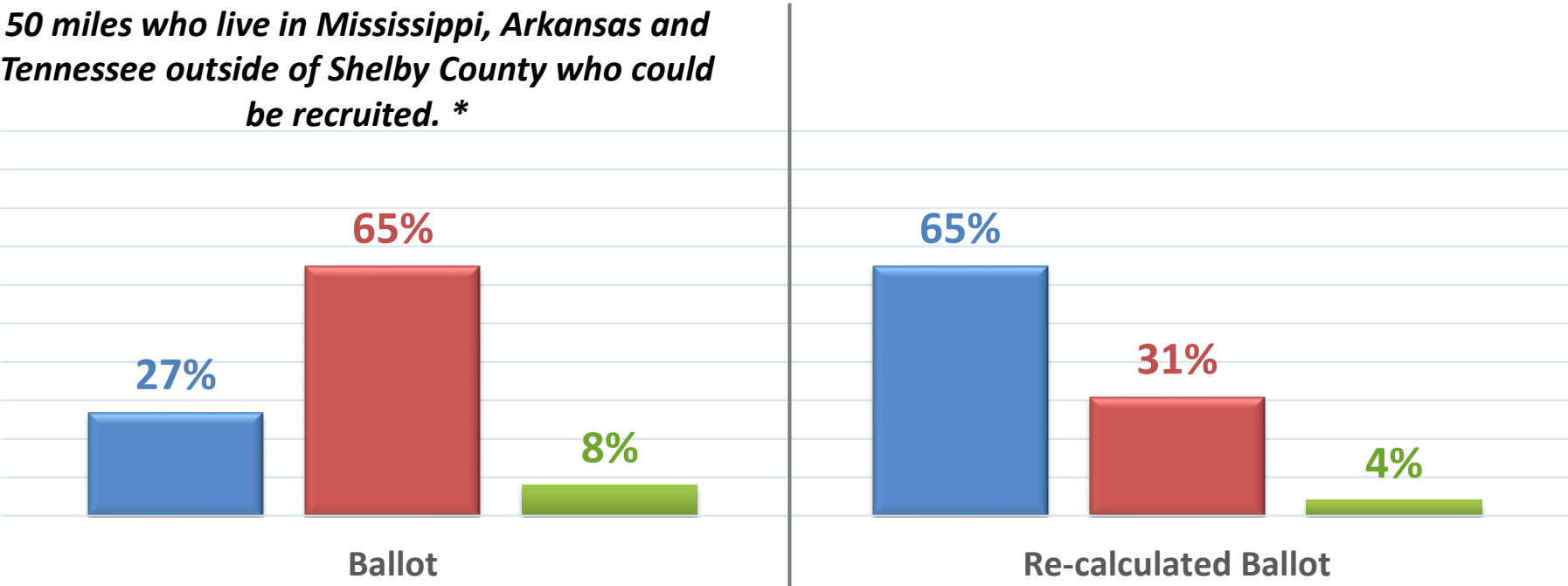
Support jumps with nearly all subgroups.

Subgroup	Official Language % Yes	Plain Language % Yes	D/S
Men (41%)	53%	55%	+2
Women (59%)	44%	50%	+6
White (40%)	55%	60%	+5
African American (53%)	43%	47%	+4
White <College (11%)	54%	71%	+13
White College+ (29%)	55%	56%	+1
AF AM <College (26%)	43%	51%	+8
AF AM College+ (27%)	44%	43%	-1

Yes support could grow if voters learn the measure is needed to attract new officers.

*And, would you vote YES, in favor or NO, against a measure if you knew: The city of Memphis police department is having difficulty finding enough officers in Memphis to keep people safe. There are good candidates within 50 miles who live in Mississippi, Arkansas and Tennessee outside of Shelby County who could be recruited. **

Re-calculated Ballot to include new "Yes" voters

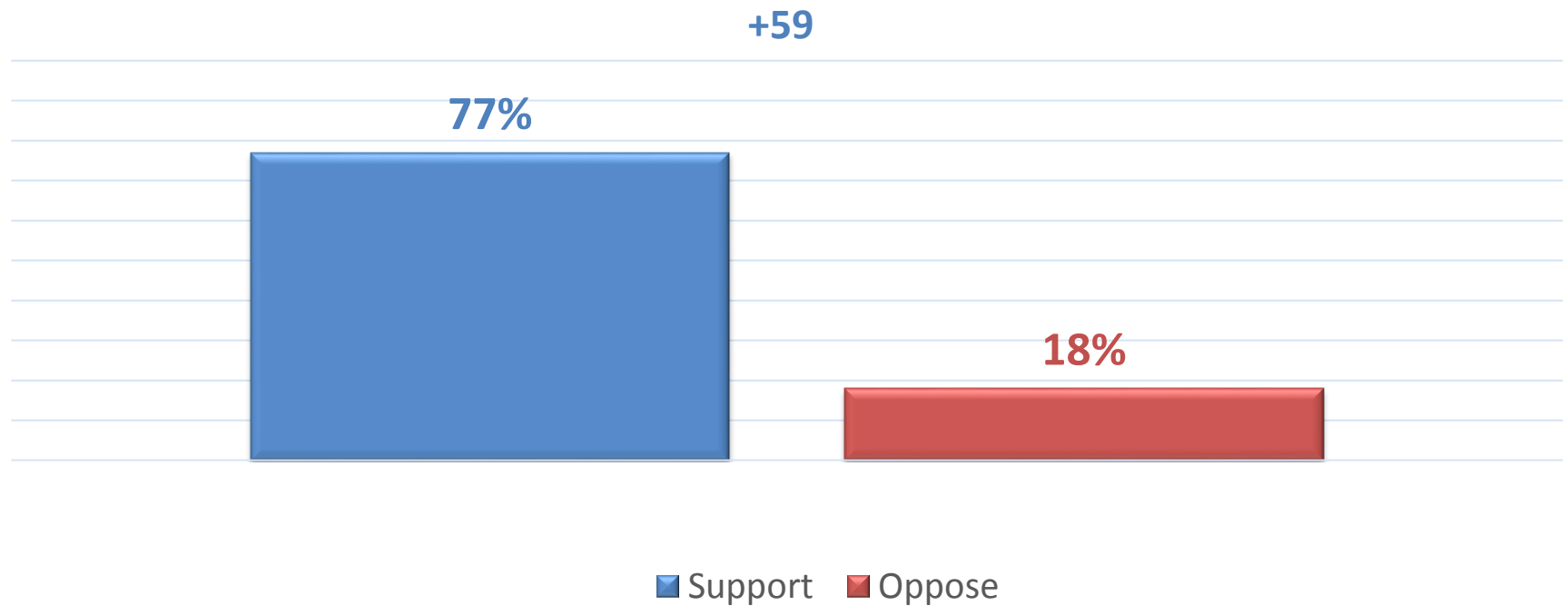


** This question was asked of Initial "No" voters and Undecided Voters*

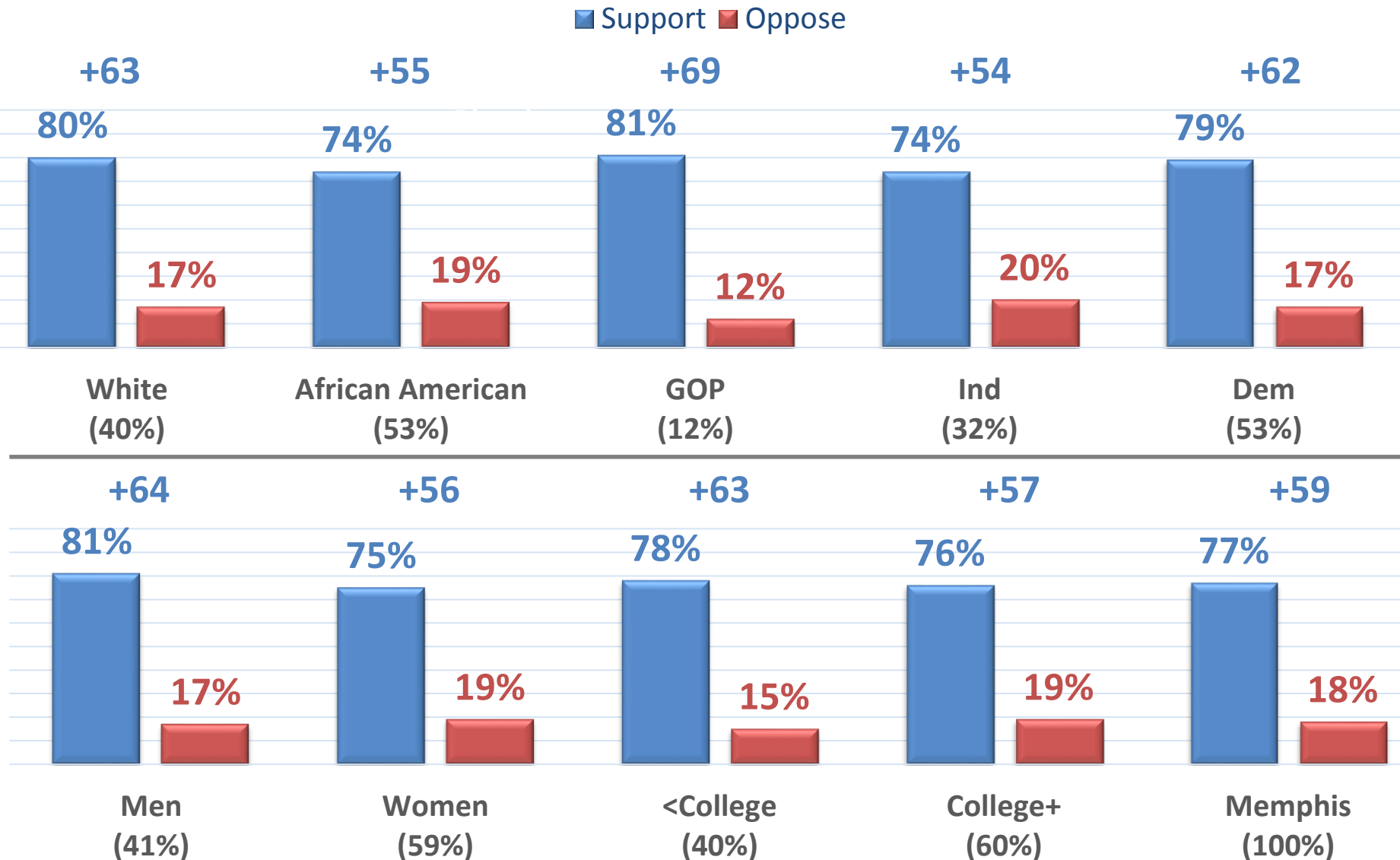
■ YES ■ NO ■ DK

Memphis voters believe they should decide the referendum's fate.

As you may know, some members of City Council are attempting to remove this measure from the ballot and deny voters the opportunity to decide this question. Regardless of how you may feel about the measure, do you support or oppose letting voters decide whether Memphis police officers can live outside city limits?



That sentiment crosses all key subgroups.



Take Away Points



Takeaway Points

- ✓ **Voters endorse making investments in public safety: hiring more police officers and giving them the tools they need to keep communities safe.**
 - ✓ **Local police departments are viewed favorably by county voters but there is a consistent racial gap on performance ratings.**
 - ✓ **African-American voters rate the police department positively, support hiring more officers and welcome an increased law enforcement presence in their neighborhoods, but it is clear the law enforcement community has significantly more to do to earn a deeper level of confidence from African-American voters.**
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