

# Voters' Attitudes on Public Safety Issues in Shelby County



Key Findings from a survey  
of 400 registered voters in  
Shelby County, TN.  
January 9-11, 2024



# Methodology



**Public Opinion Strategies presents the key findings from a survey of 400 registered voters in Shelby County, Tennessee.**

**The survey was conducted January 9-11, 2024 and has a margin of error of  $\pm 4.9\%$ . Interviews were completed via landline and cell phones and mobile text-to-web.**

**Patrick Lanne was the primary researcher and pollster on the project. Chris Andrews was the project director and Ruby Miller provided analytical assistance.**

**Public Opinion Strategies completed two previous surveys for the Crime Commission: July 26-28, 2020 (N=450) and September 18-22, 2021 (N=425).**

## Demographic Breakdown of Sample.

Demographic	Shelby County (100%)	City Of Memphis (63%)
<b>RACE</b>		
White	47% (N=188)	31% (N=79)
African American	47% (N=188)	60% (N=153)
Other/Refused	6% (N=23)	8% (N=20)
<b>GENDER</b>		
Female	58% (N=232)	60% (N=152)
Male	42% (N=168)	40% (N=101)
<b>AGE</b>		
18-44	44% (N=176)	45% (N=114)
45-64	32% (N=128)	27% (N=69)
65+	24% (N=96)	28% (N=70)
<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>		
City of Memphis	63% (N=253)	100%
Rest of County	37% (N=147)	0%

# Key Findings: Issue Priorities

## #1

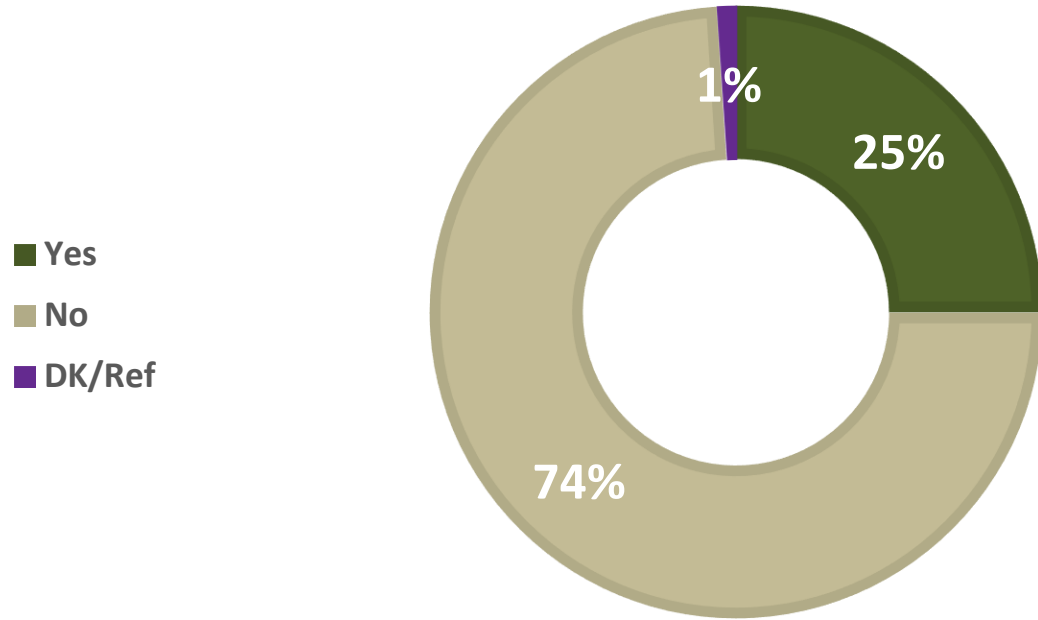
Crime has skyrocketed to the top of the issue agenda.

Over half (57%) of Shelby County voters name crime as their top priority for elected officials— more than doubling the number of voters who named crime (22%) as their top priority in 2021.

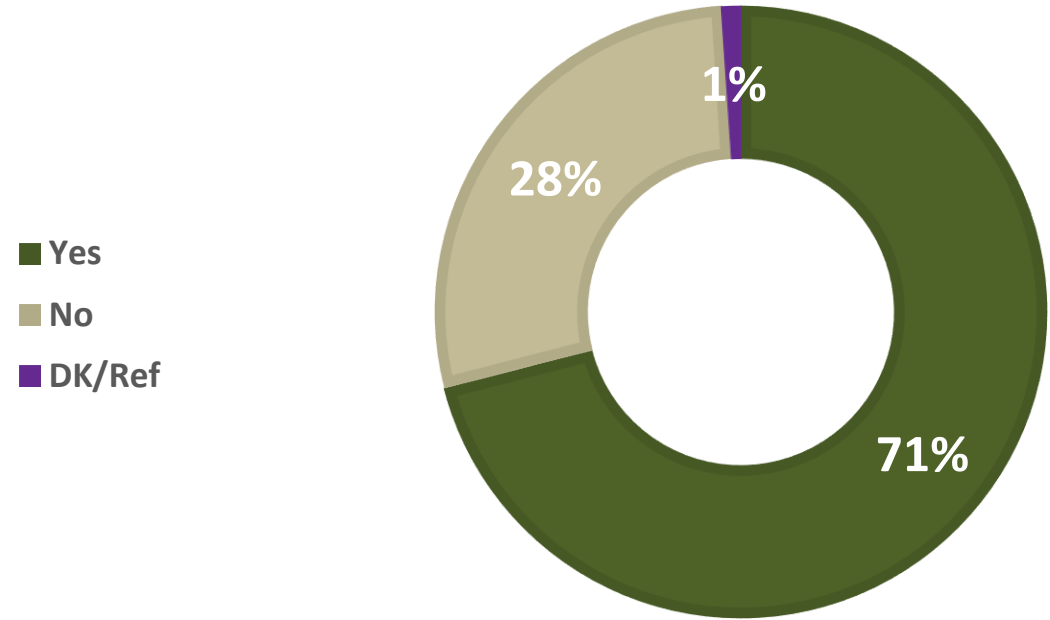
**Crime ranks as the top priority for every major demographic and geographic subgroup in the poll.**

When asked which specific crime and public safety issue was the most important to focus on, Shelby County voters named gun violence (38%) their top concern with juvenile crime (22%) a distant second. Gun violence ranked highest with all major subgroups.

A quarter of county voters report being a victim of violent crime.



*First, have you ever been a victim of a violent crime?*

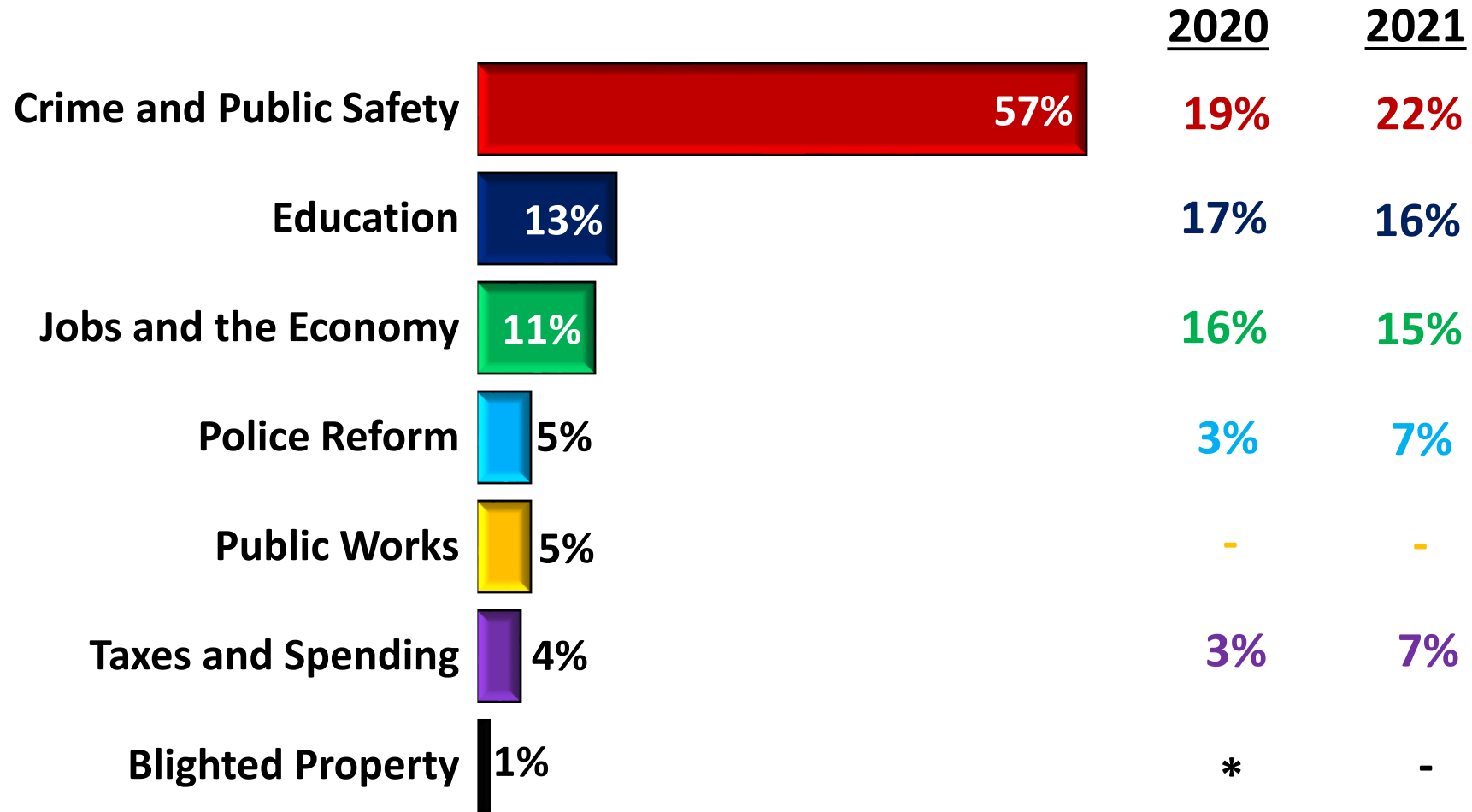


*Next, have you ever been a victim of a property crime such as burglary, vehicle theft or vehicle break in?*

Crime is the top issue with every subgroup.

<i><b>Subgroups</b></i>	<i><b>Violent Crime Victim</b></i>	<i><b>Property Crime Victim</b></i>
<b>Men</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>Memphis</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>72%</b>
<b>Rest Shelby</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>70%</b>
<b>African-American</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>66%</b>
<b>White</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Non-College</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>71%</b>
<b>College+</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>73%</b>

# Crime dominates the Shelby County issue agenda.



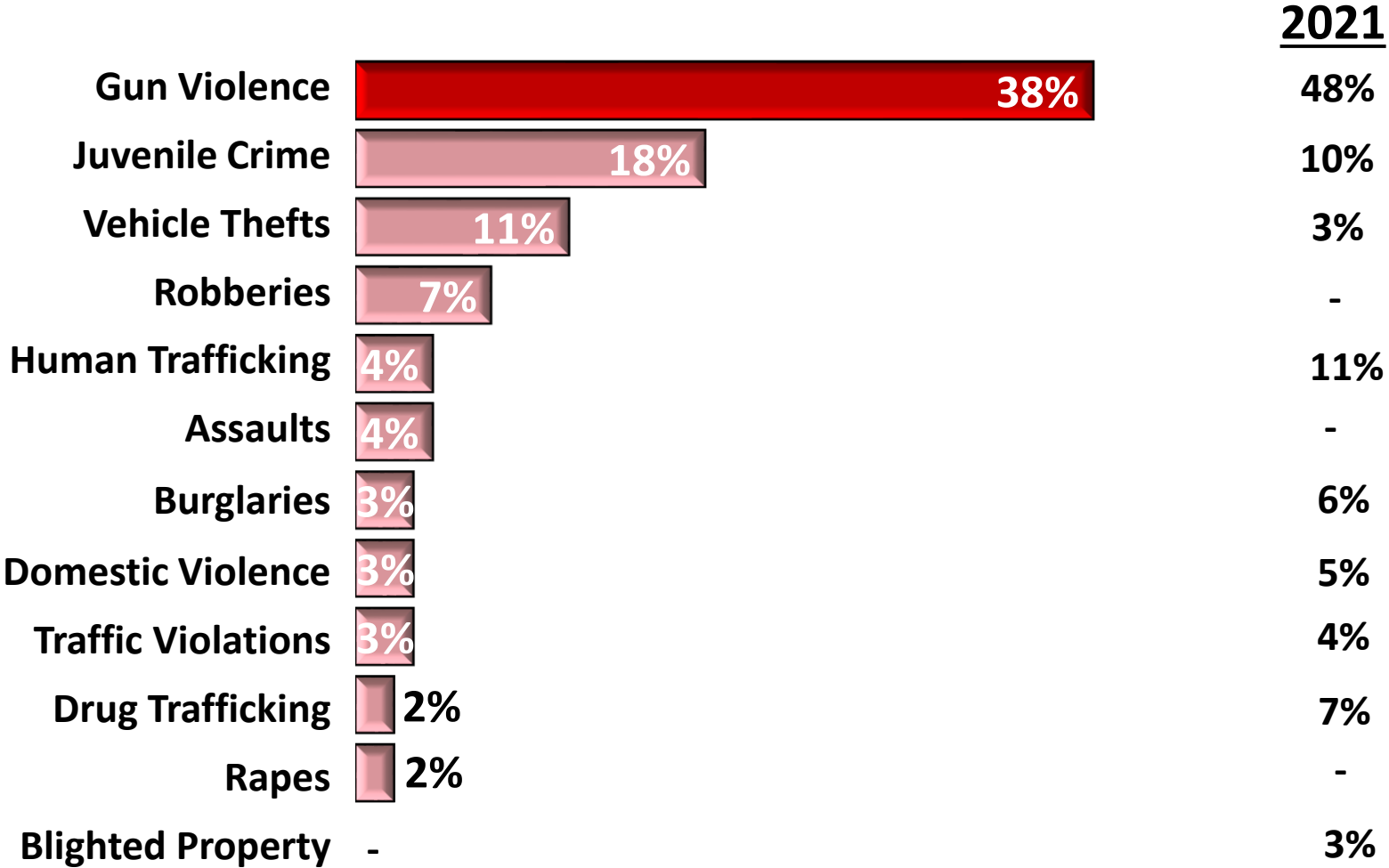
*First, which ONE of the following issues do you believe should be the top priority for government leaders? Is it....*



Crime is the top issue with every subgroup.

<i>Subgroups</i>	<i>Sept 18-2021</i>	<i>Jan 9-11, 2024</i>	<i>Diff</i>
<b>Men</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>+37</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>+34</b>
<b>Memphis</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>+34</b>
<b>Rest Shelby</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>+37</b>
<b>African-American</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>+32</b>
<b>White</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>+39</b>
<b>Non-College</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>+32</b>
<b>College+</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>+39</b>

Specifically, gun violence remains the most pressing concern.



*Next, on the issue of crime and public safety, which ONE of the following do you think is the most important to focus on? Is it...*

# Key Findings: Outlook on the Criminal Justice System

## #2

Since our 2021 poll, Shelby County voters express more concern about their personal safety and more negativity about the criminal justice system.

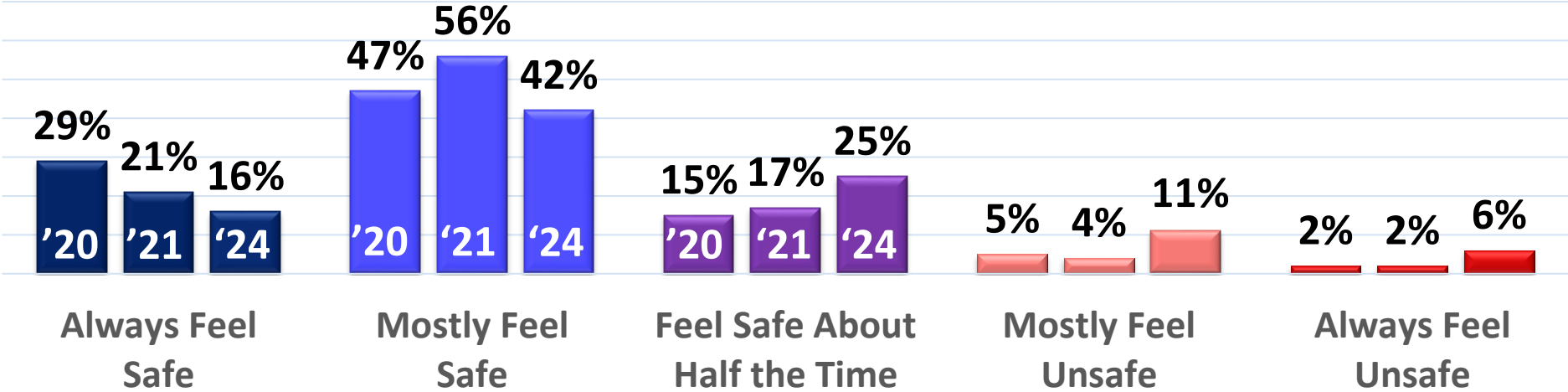
- **First, just 58% of Shelby County voters say they feel safe in their neighborhood – that’s down from 77% in 2021. In addition, the share of voters who say they “always feels safe” declined 13-points since 2020. Finally, the number of voters who report feeling “unsafe” has nearly tripled (17% from 6%) since 2021.**
- **Next, Only 30% of voters believe crime victims receive “a lot” (4%) or “some” (30%) support and assistance from the criminal justice system. That represents a 10-point drop from our last poll.**

## #2

- **Additionally, perception of the criminal justice system being too lenient for both juvenile offenders (+29) and adult offenders (+16) soared. Importantly, every major subgroup believes both juvenile and adult offenders are treated too leniently with subtle differences by race and geography.**
- **Finally, in a near consensus, Shelby County voters endorse a proposal to require supervision for juvenile offenders past their 19<sup>th</sup> birthdays: 87% support – 8% oppose. The overwhelming majority of every major subgroup supports the proposal. And, support for the measure is extremely deep (72% strongly support).**

# Fewer Shelby County voters say they feel safe in their neighborhood.

2020	2021	2024	
76%	77%	58%	<b>TOTAL FEEL SAFE</b>
7%	6%	17%	<b>TOTAL FEEL UNSAFE</b>



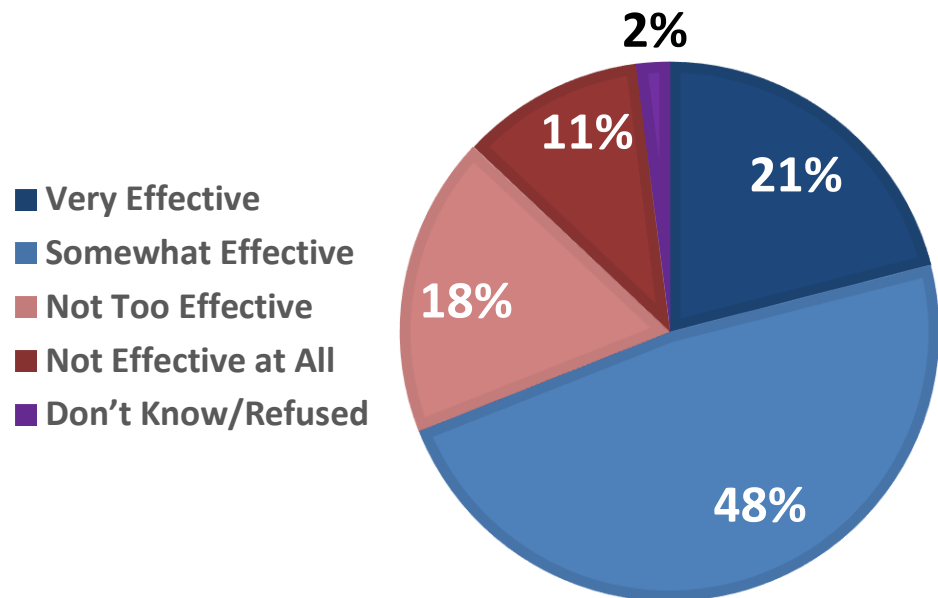
First, which one of the following best describes your feelings about your safety from crime in your neighborhood? Would you say...

There are differences based on gender, race, geography and educational attainment.

<i>Subgroups</i>	<i>Feel Safe% – Feel Unsafe%</i>	<i>Always Safe% - Mostly Safe%</i>
Men	66% - 11%	23% - 43%
Women	53% - 21%	12% - 41%
Memphis	54% - 17%	12% - 41%
Rest Shelby	67% - 16%	24% - 43%
African-American	49% - 22%	13% - 36%
White	68% - 11%	21% - 48%
Non-College	53% - 18%	15% - 38%
College+	66% - 16%	19% - 47%
Violent Crime Victim	54% - 22%	15% - 40%
Property Crime Victim	58% - 16%	16%- 41%

Although voters generally view neighborhood-based groups as an effective tool against crime, only one-in-five say they are “very effective” in preventing crime.

2021	2024	
74%	69%	<b>TOTAL EFFECTIVE</b>
22%	29%	<b>TOTAL NOT EFFECTIVE</b>



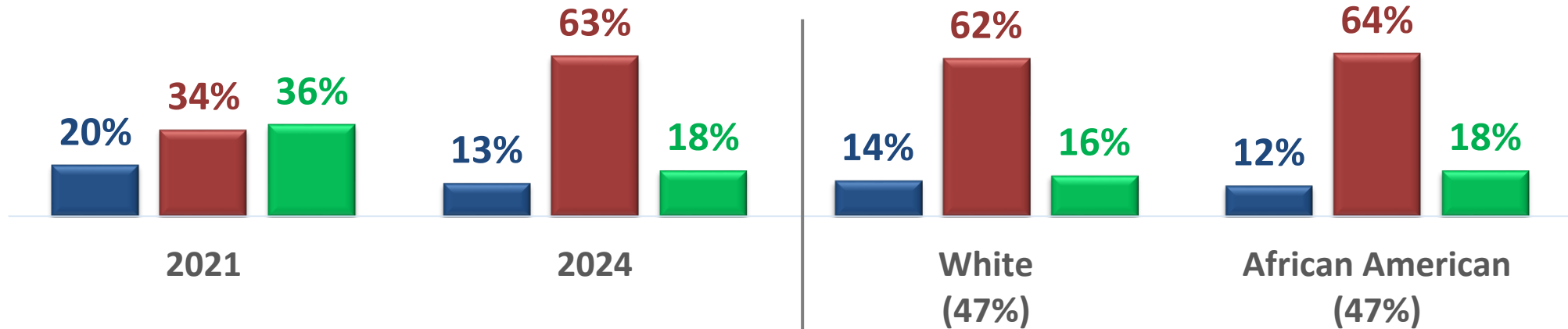
Subgroups	Effective% – Not Effective%
Men	67% - 31%
Women	70% - 28%
Memphis	69% - 28%
Rest Shelby	69% - 31%
African-American	70% - 28%
White	68% - 30%
Non-College	69% - 30%
College+	69% - 28%

First, how effective do you think community involvement through neighborhood-based groups like Neighborhood Watch are in preventing crime?

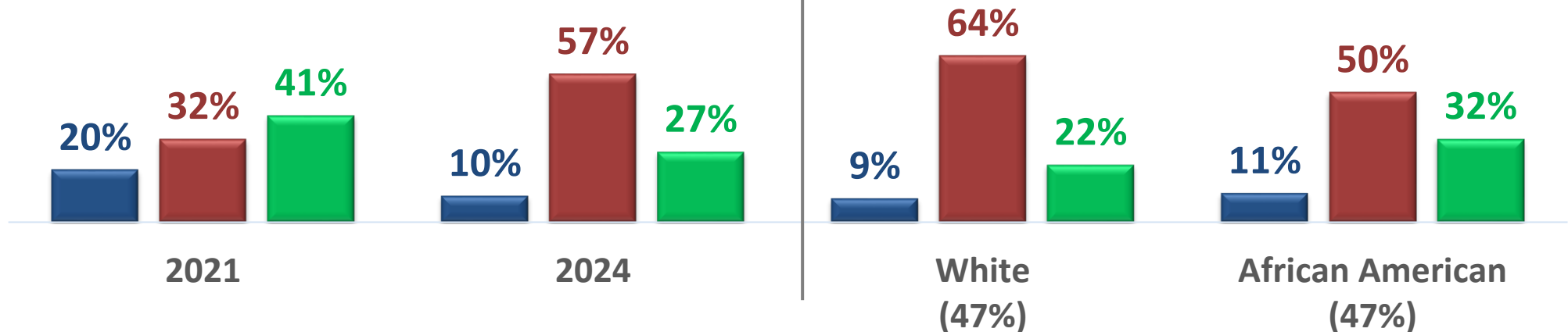


# Concern about leniency in the criminal justice system spiked.

*Do you believe the criminal justice system treats JUVENILES who commit crimes...*



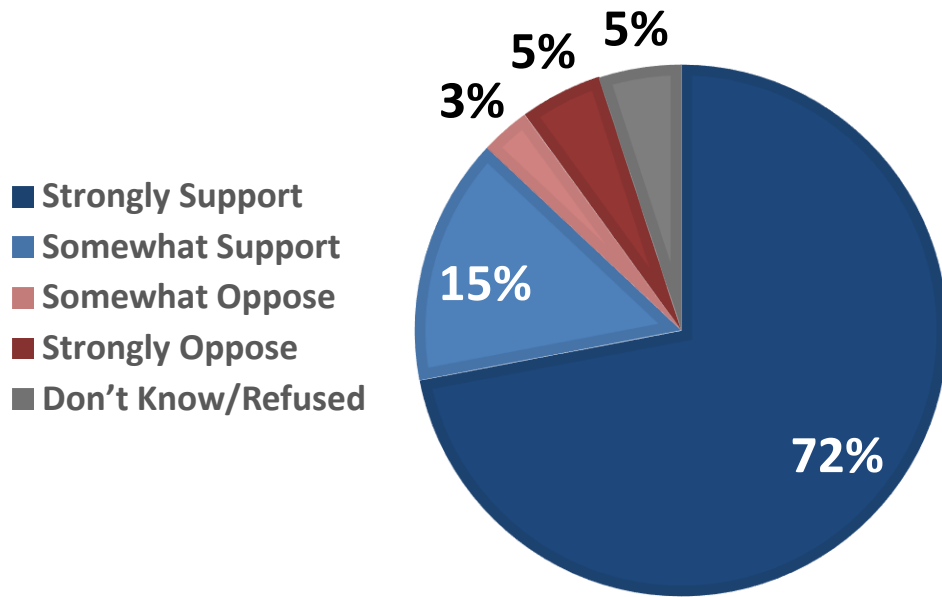
*Do you believe the criminal justice system treat ADULTS who commit crimes ...*



■ Too Harshly    
 ■ Too Leniently    
 ■ About Right

# Voters overwhelmingly support requiring juvenile offenders to be supervised past their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**87% TOTAL SUPPORT**  
**8% TOTAL OPPOSE**

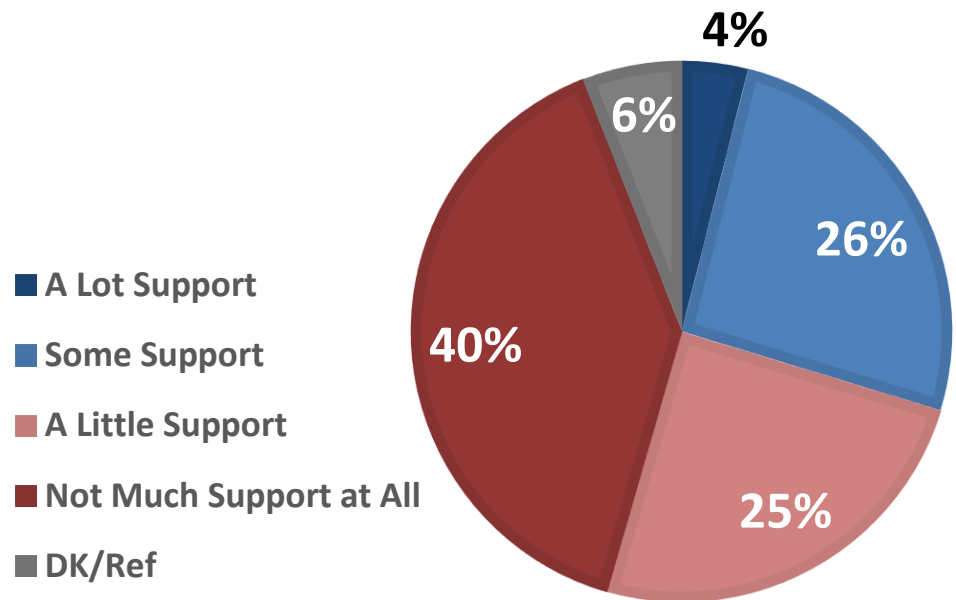


<i>Subgroups</i>	<i>Support% – Oppose%</i>
Men	86% - 10%
Women	88% - 7%
Memphis	84% - 9%
Rest Shelby	92% - 6%
African-American	84% - 11%
White	90% - 5%
Non-College	87% - 8%
College+	87% - 8%

*As you may know, under current state law, juvenile offenders who are convicted of committing serious violent offenses are released from the juvenile system without supervision, treatment or rehabilitation no later than their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. Knowing this, do you support or oppose changing the current state law so that serious violent juvenile offenders are required to receive supervision, treatment and rehabilitation past their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday?*

# Perception of the system's support for crime victims has declined.

2021	2024	
40%	30%	<b>TOTAL A LOT / SOME</b>
54%	64%	<b>TOTAL LITTLE / NOT THAT MUCH</b>



Subgroups	A Lot/Some% – Little/Not Much At All %
Men	28% - 65%
Women	31% - 64%
Memphis	31% - 64%
Rest Shelby	27% - 66%
African-American	34% - 61%
White	27% - 66%
Non-College	31% - 63%
College+	27% - 66%

Next, how much support and assistance do you think victims of crime and their families get from the criminal justice system?

# Key Findings: Local Police Job Performance

## #3

The job rating for local police departments declined across the county since our 2020 poll. Today, a slim majority (51%) rate their local police performance positively – a drop of 20 points. In addition, the number of voters who give their police department an “excellent” rating is now tied with those who give the police a “poor” rating at 16%.

Overall, job ratings for the local police dropped with every subset of voters. There are significant differences by geography and race:

- In Memphis, just 41% of voters give the police an “excellent/good” rating. In the rest of the county, 69% of voters say the police are doing an “excellent/good” job.
- The “excellent/good” rating for local police is lower among African-American voters (42%) than white voters (65%).

## #3

(cont'd)

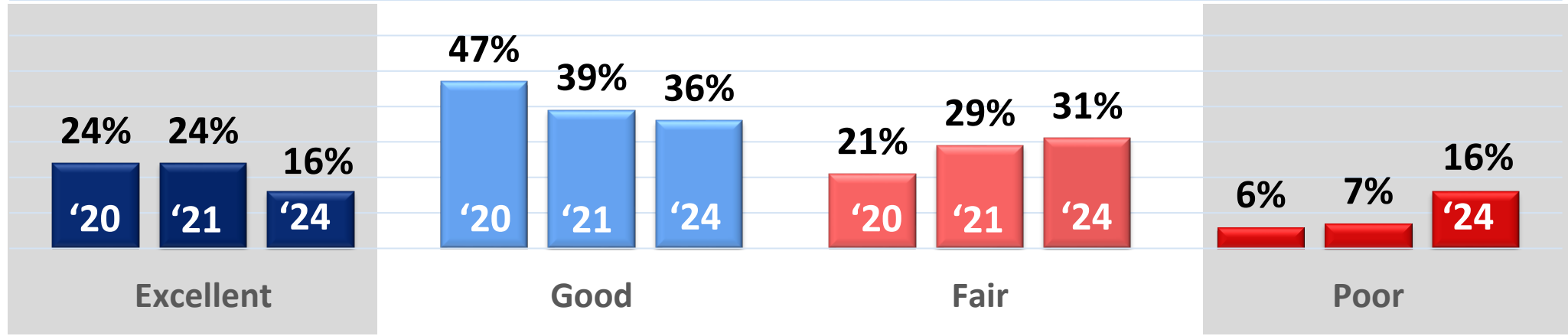
More specifically, seven-in-ten voters give the police negative marks on “protecting people from violent crime” – continuing a downward trend from our last poll.

While overall ratings for the police dropped, Shelby County voters continue to overwhelmingly agree with the following statements:

- *I respect my local law enforcement* (93% agree)
- *My friends and neighbors generally respect local law enforcement* (87% agree)
- *I would like an increased local law enforcement presence in my neighborhood* (75% agree)

# Voters are split on the job performance of local police.

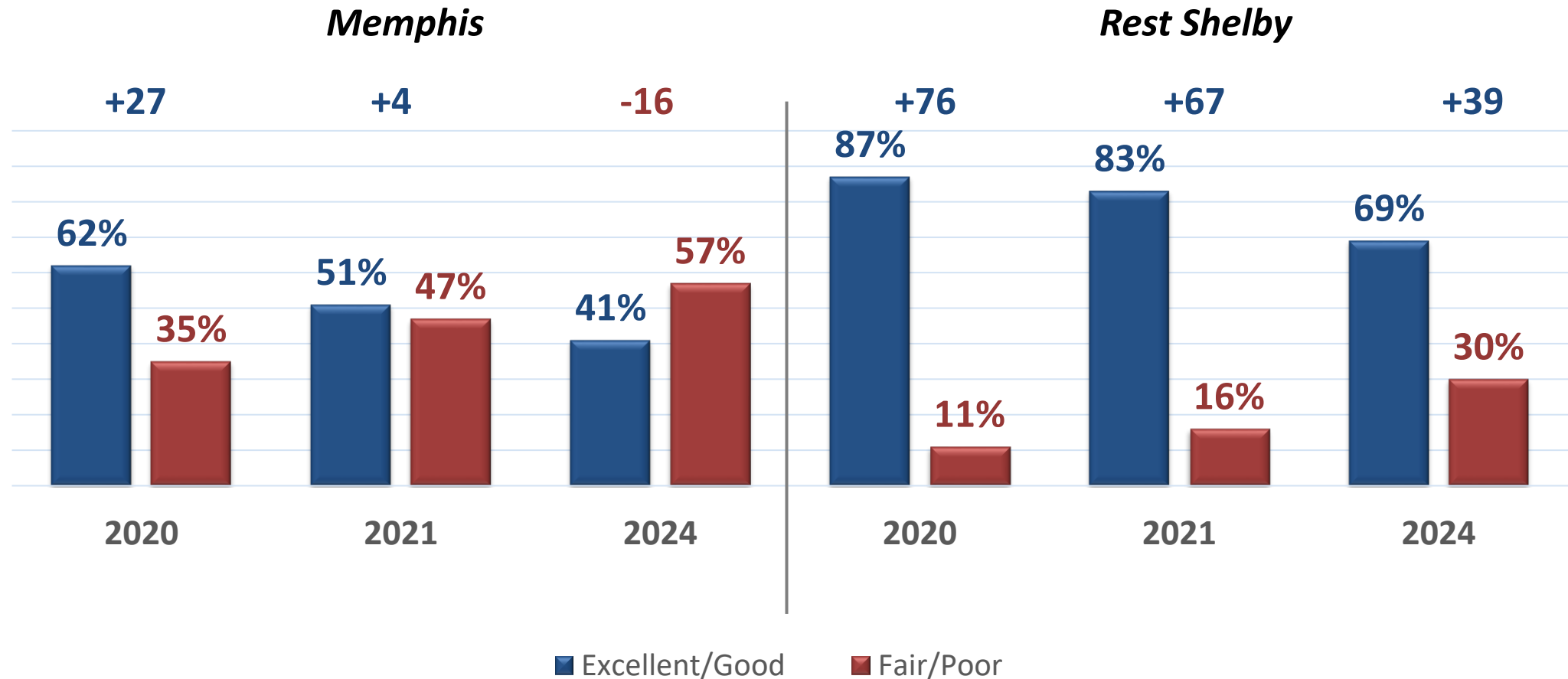
2020	2021	2024	
71%	62%	51%	<b>TOTAL EXCELLENT/GOOD</b>
27%	36%	47%	<b>TOTAL FAIR/POOR</b>



*How would you rate the job your local police are doing in your neighborhood?  
Would you say...*

In Memphis, local police receive a net negative rating. In the rest of the county, local police continue to receive positive marks, but the net rating declined at a similar rate as Memphis.

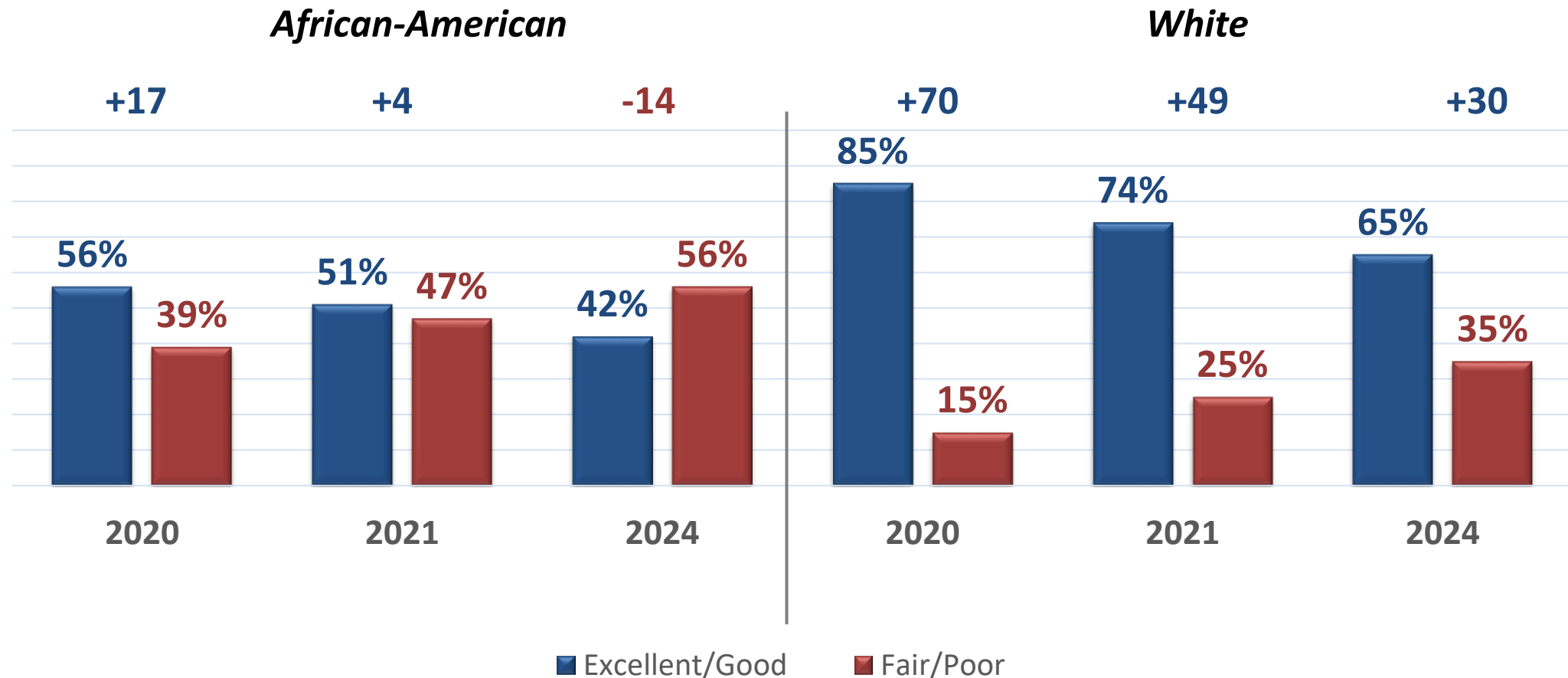
**Local Police Performance by Geography**



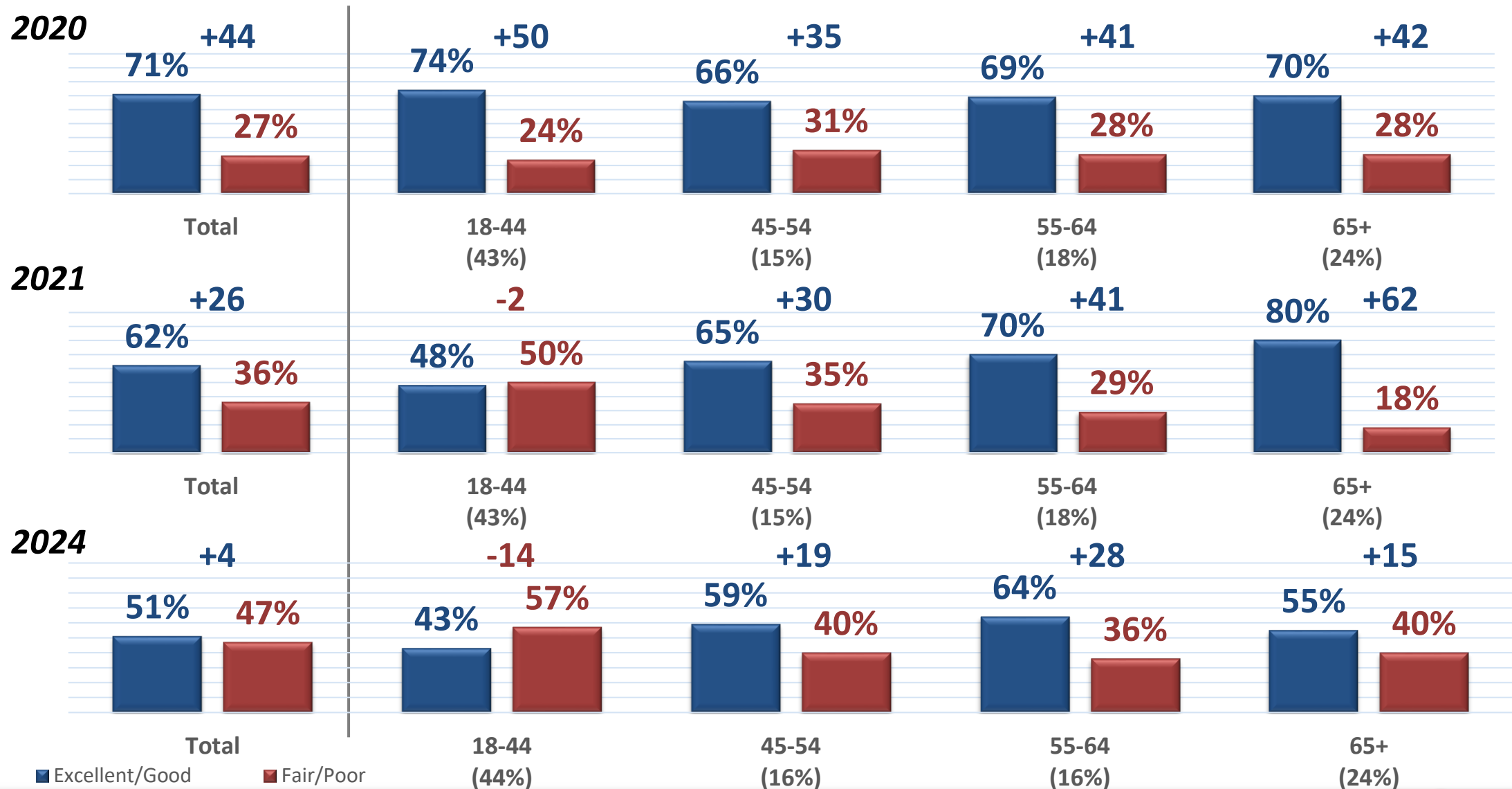


The police receive a net negative rating from African-American voters. White voters remain 2:1 positive overall but significantly less positive than 2020.

### Local Police Performance by Race

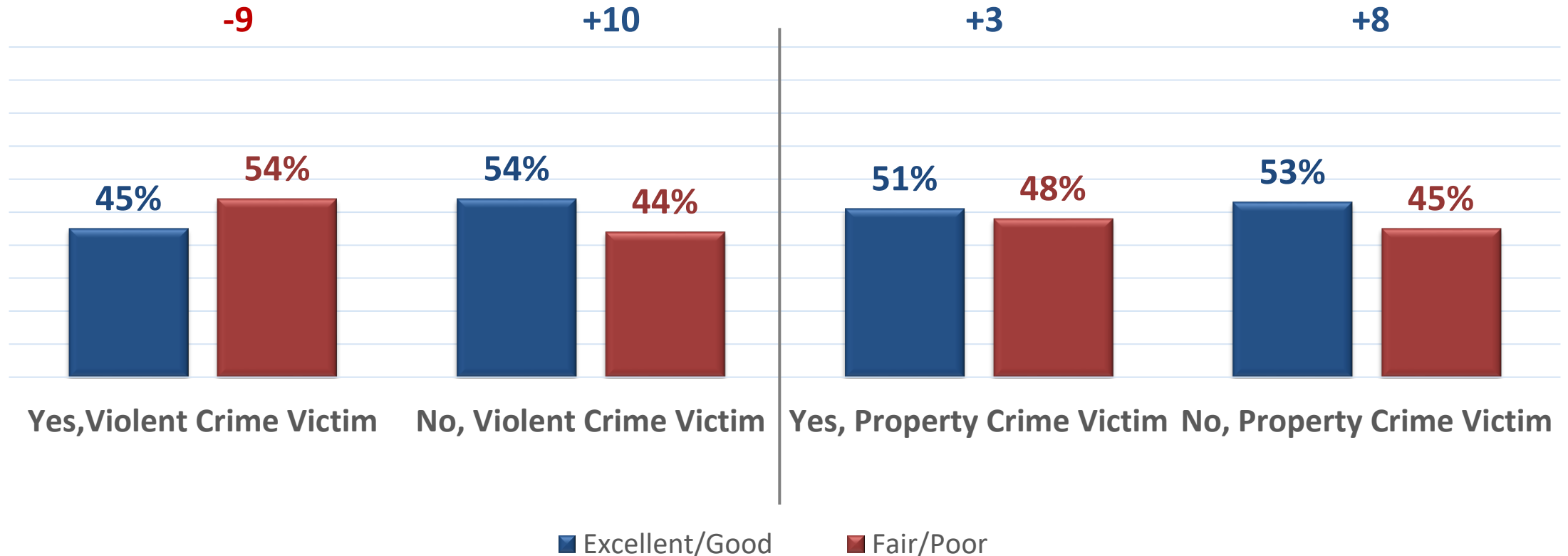


There has been a dramatic drop in confidence among younger voters.



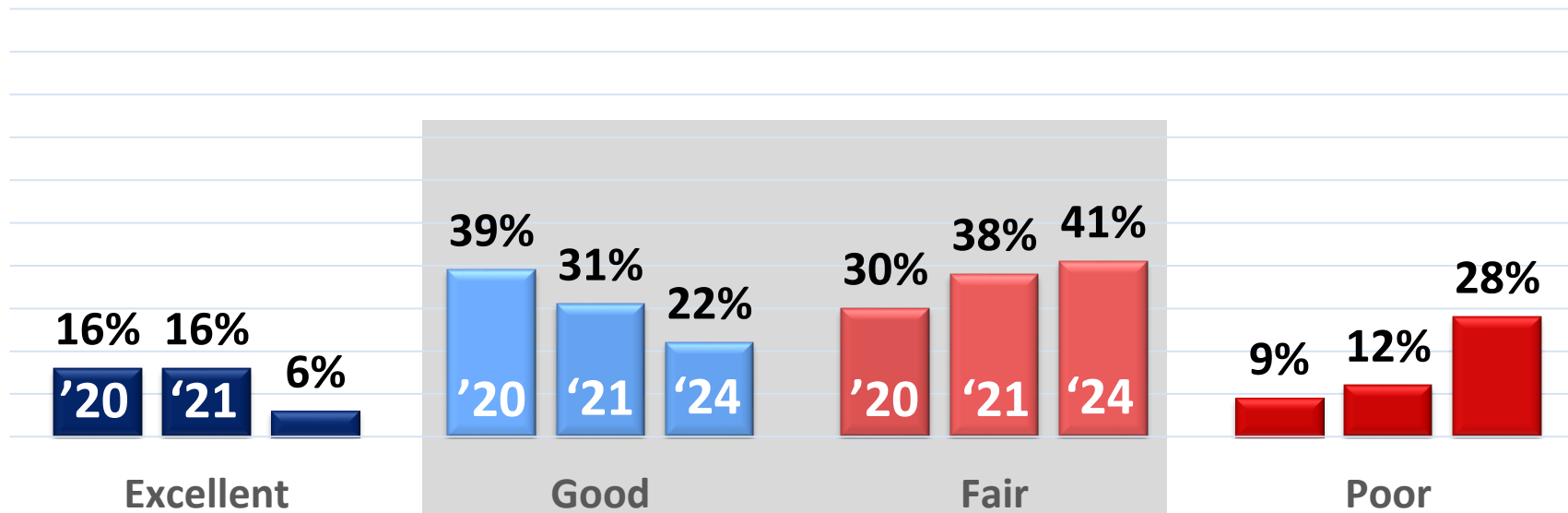
Violent crime victims are more negative toward the police.

*Local Police Performance by Victim of Crime*



The rating for “protecting people from violent crime” plummeted.

2020	2021	2024	
56%	48%	27%	<b>TOTAL EXCELLENT/GOOD</b>
39%	49%	70%	<b>TOTAL FAIR/POOR</b>



Next, please rate the job your local police are doing on each of the following issues:  
**Protecting people from violent crime**

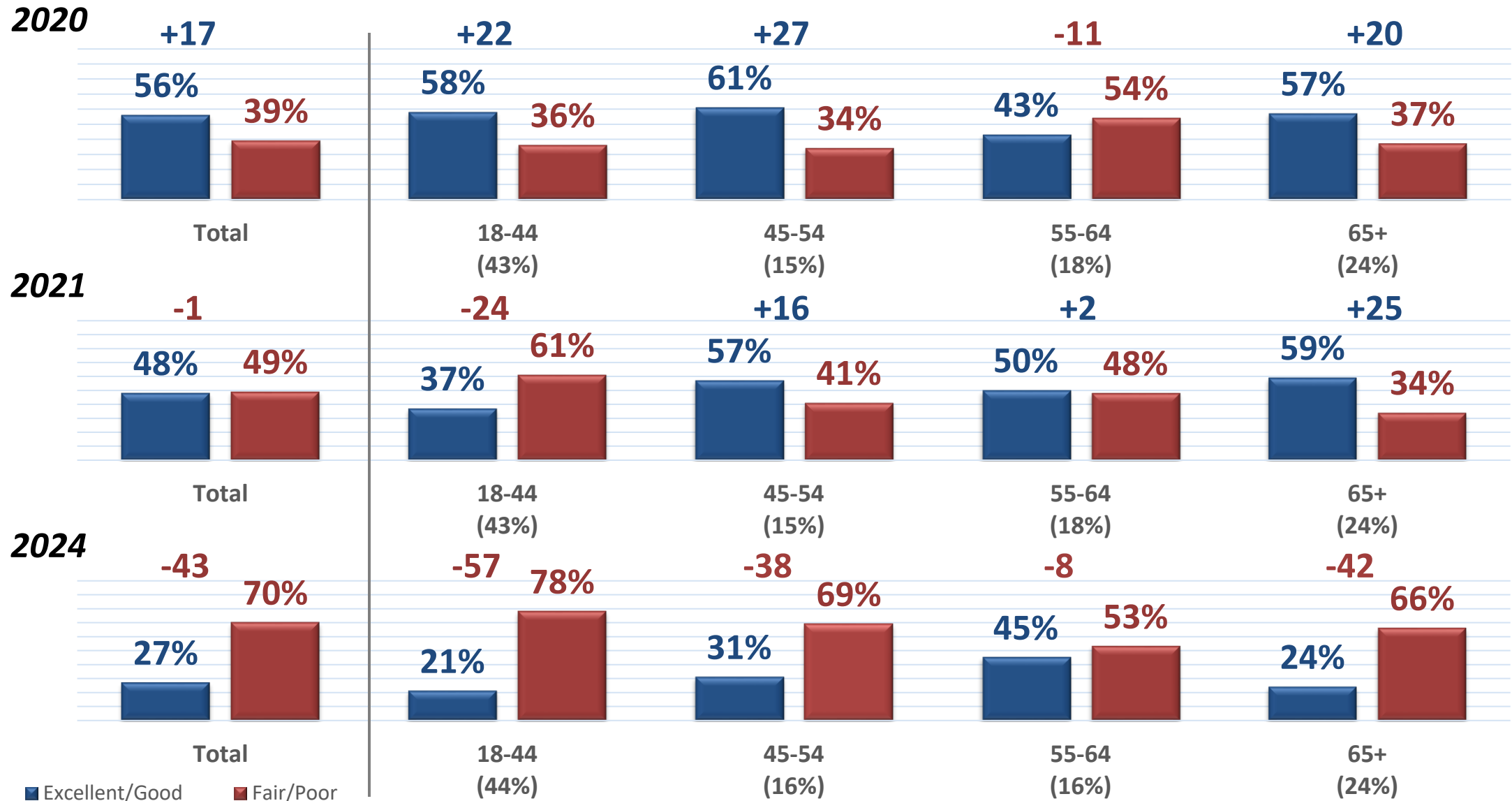
Every subgroup has grown more negative since 2020.

Subgroups	2020 (Excel/Good- Fair/Poor)	2021 (Excel/Good- Fair/Poor)	2024 (Excel/Good- Fair/Poor)
Men	58% - 36%	48% - 49%	28% - 69%
Women	54% - 42%	47% - 50%	27% - 70%
Memphis	52% - 43%	34% - 62%	17% - 79%
Rest Shelby	62% - 33%	73% - 25%	45% - 54%
African-American	43% - 50%	37% - 59%	19% - 78%
White	70% - 28%	58% - 40%	38% - 59%
Non-College	52% - 41%	43% - 53%	28% - 69%
College+	60% - 37%	52% - 46%	26% - 72%
Violent Crime Victim	N/A	N/A	18% - 79%
Property Crime Victim	N/A	N/A	28% - 68%

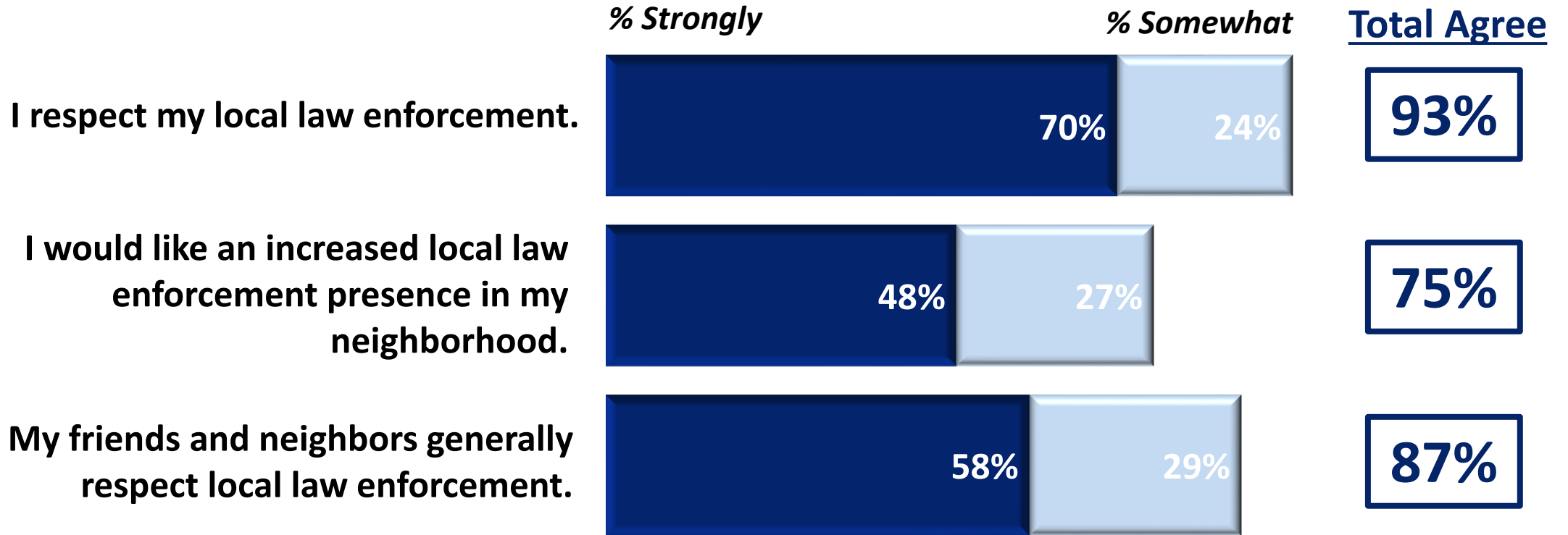
Next, please rate the job your local police are doing on each of the following issues:

*Protecting people from violent crime*

# “Protecting People From Violent Crime” by Age



While overall performance ratings are down, Shelby County voters overwhelmingly agree with each of the following statements:



*Next, I'm going to read you several statements. After I read each one, please tell me if you AGREE or DISAGREE with that statement.*

There are some differences between Memphis and the rest of Shelby County.

Strongly Agree%	I respect my local law enforcement.			My friends and neighbors generally respect local law enforcement.			I would like an increased local law enforcement presence in my neighborhood.		
	2020	2021	2024	2020	2021	2024	2020	2021	2024
Men	66%	76%	67%	56%	67%	58%	35%	44%	43%
Women	68%	79%	71%	56%	69%	59%	38%	50%	52%
Memphis	61%	71%	67%	49%	61%	56%	35%	57%	53%
Rest Shelby	79%	88%	74%	69%	82%	62%	39%	32%	41%
Af-American	68%	76%	68%	49%	61%	55%	42%	57%	56%
White	68%	78%	71%	64%	75%	61%	33%	40%	41%
Non-College	69%	75%	70%	50%	63%	58%	43%	57%	53%
College+	62%	80%	69%	56%	74%	59%	26%	39%	42%



# Key Findings: Policy Proposals

## #4

**Shelby County voters continue to strongly endorse hiring policy officers (84% total support). Indeed, support has hardened since our 2021 poll with 69% of voters strongly supporting hiring more police compared to 59% in 2021.**

**Every public safety proposal we tested enjoyed a near consensus level of support among Shelby County voters.**

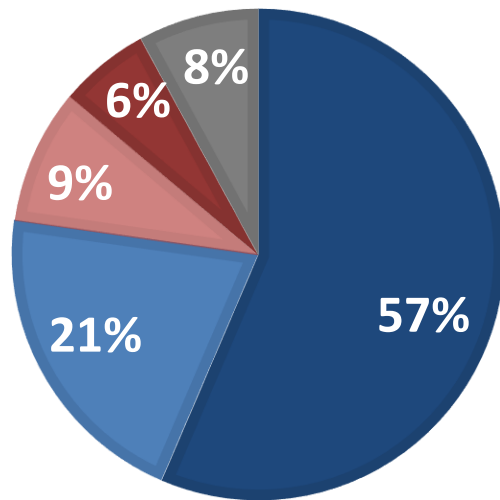
**Each proposal scored above 77% total support. Five of the six proposals received 87% support or higher and three of the six items scored 95% support or higher.**

**The proposals were overwhelmingly endorsed by every major subgroup.**

There remains overwhelming support for hiring more police officers, with an uptick in intensity this year.

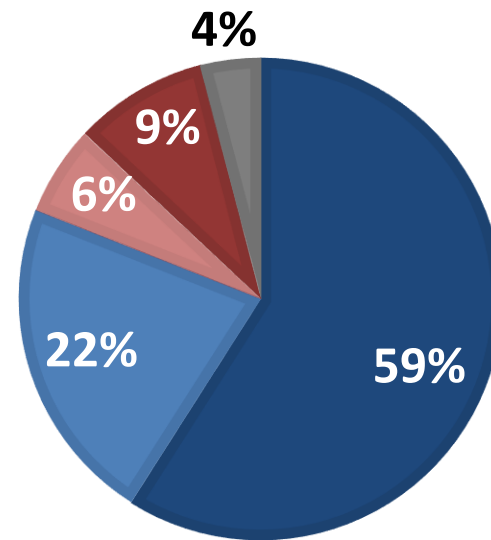
2020

**78% TOTAL SUPPORT**  
**15% TOTAL OPPOSE**



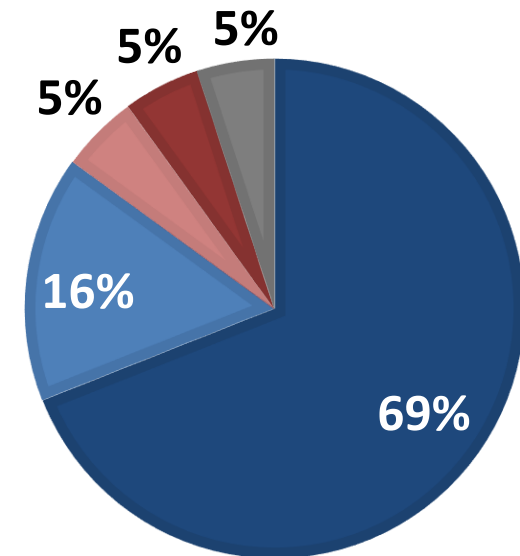
2021

**81% TOTAL SUPPORT**  
**15% TOTAL OPPOSE**



2024

**84% TOTAL SUPPORT**  
**10% TOTAL OPPOSE**



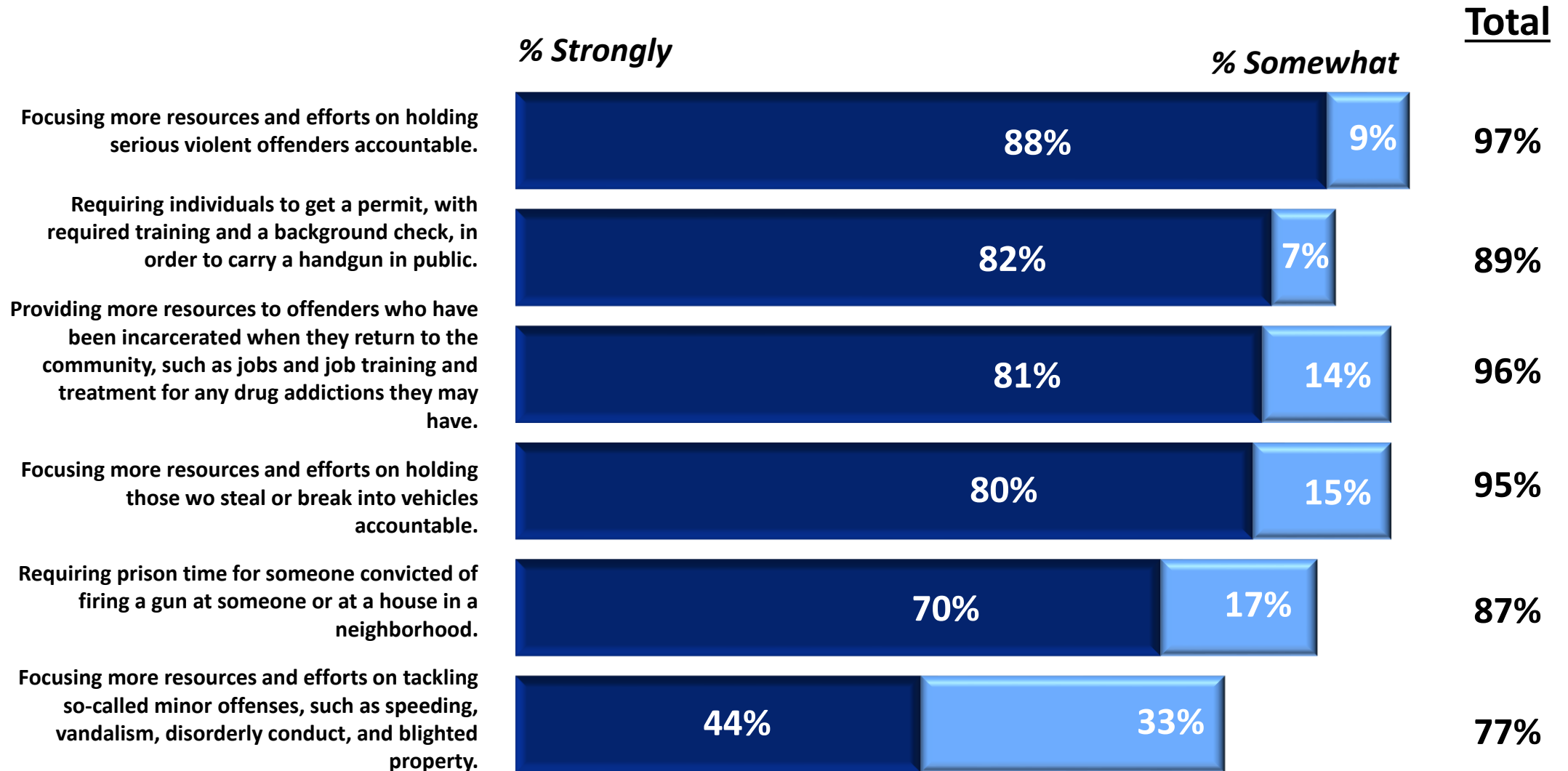
■ Strongly Support ■ Somewhat Support ■ Somewhat Oppose ■ Strongly Oppose ■ Don't Know/Refused

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

Support for hiring more officers cuts across all subgroups.

<i>Subgroups</i>	<i>Total Support% – Total Oppose%</i>
<b>Men</b>	<b>81% - 13%</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>87% - 9%</b>
<b>Memphis</b>	<b>84% - 10%</b>
<b>Rest Shelby</b>	<b>86% - 12%</b>
<b>African-American</b>	<b>83% - 9%</b>
<b>White</b>	<b>85% - 13%</b>
<b>Non-College</b>	<b>84% - 11%</b>
<b>College+</b>	<b>85% - 10%</b>

All proposals enjoy high levels of support. The most supported proposals center around increased accountability.



Next, I'm going to read you several proposals. After I read each one, please tell me if you SUPPORT or OPPOSE that proposal.

# Proposal Support by Subgroup

Subgroups % Strongly Support	Violent Offenders	Background Checks	Resources for Offenders	Vehicle Theft	Gun Crimes	Minor Offenses
<b>Men</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Memphis</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>Rest Shelby</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>African-American</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>White</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Non-College</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>College+</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>43%</b>

# Take Away Points

- ✓ **With elevated concerns about personal safety and the county's level of crime, Shelby County voters express more negativity toward the criminal justice system and its institutions.**
- ✓ **While the job rating for local police decline, voters continue to express a high degree of respect for police officers. They would like a stronger police presence in their communities and overwhelmingly endorse hiring more police officers.**
- ✓ **The outlook on crime and the police vary by race and geography, but the trend lines are similar across the demographic and geographic subgroups.**
- ✓ **In this public safety environment, proposals calling for more public safety resources and greater accountability in the system enjoy broad support.**