

Voters' Attitudes on Public Safety Issues in Shelby County



Key Findings from a survey
of 400 registered voters in
Shelby County, TN.
February 7-11, 2026

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

The survey was conducted February 7-11, 2026 and has a margin of error of $\pm 4.90\%$. Interviews were completed via on-line panel and mobile text-to-web.

Patrick Lanne was the primary researcher and pollster on the project. Luke Jackson was the project director and Sydney Gallagher provided analytical assistance.

Public Opinion Strategies completed three previous surveys for the Crime Commission: July 26-28, 2020 (N=450), September 18-22, 2021 (N=425) and January 9-11, 2024 (N=400)

Demographic Breakdown of Sample

Demographic	Shelby County (100%)	City Of Memphis (61%)
RACE		
White	48% (N=192)	35% (N=84)
African American	47% (N=188)	61% (N=148)
Other/Refused	5% (N=19)	4% (N=11)
GENDER		
Female	58% (N=232)	62% (N=151)
Male	42% (N=168)	38% (N=92)
AGE		
18-44	41% (N=164)	41% (N=100)
45-64	33% (N=132)	32% (N=77)
65+	26% (N=104)	27% (N=66)
GEOGRAPHY		
City of Memphis	61% (N=243)	100%
Rest of County	39% (N=157)	0%

Key Findings: Issue Priorities

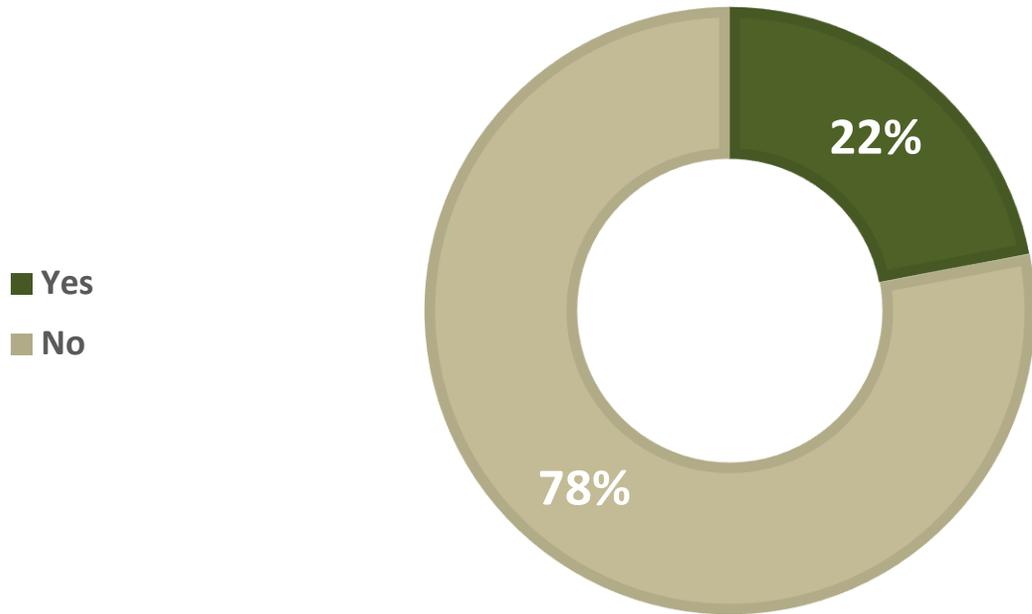
#1

Crime (32%) remains the top concern for Shelby County voters but unlike our 2024 poll, it no longer dominates the issue agenda. Jobs and the economy soared from 11% in 2024 to 28% today and now sit in a virtual dead heat with crime on voters' priority list. Crime and jobs/economy are the top two issue priorities for nearly every subgroup in the poll.

Increased economic pessimism – not crime concerns dissipating – is likely the major factor in the change on top of the issue agenda. Overall dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system remains high, and voters' sense of safety improved only modestly. Even if it no longer dominates the issue agenda, crime remains a “hot issue” with county voters.

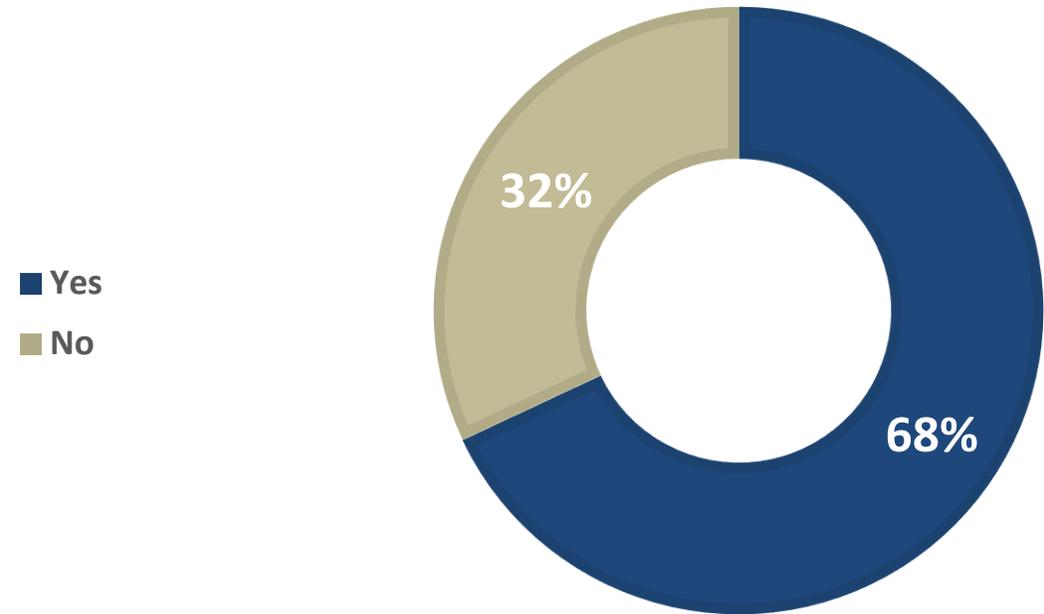
Like our previous surveys, county voters remain laser-focused on “gun violence” as their top priority on the list of specific crime/public safety concerns. Gun violence is the top crime/public safety priority with every major demographic subgroup.

Nearly 1-in-4 Shelby voters report being a victim of a violent crime.
 More than two-thirds of voters are a property crime victim.



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

<u>Trend</u>	<u>1/24</u>	<u>2/26</u>
Yes%	25%	22%



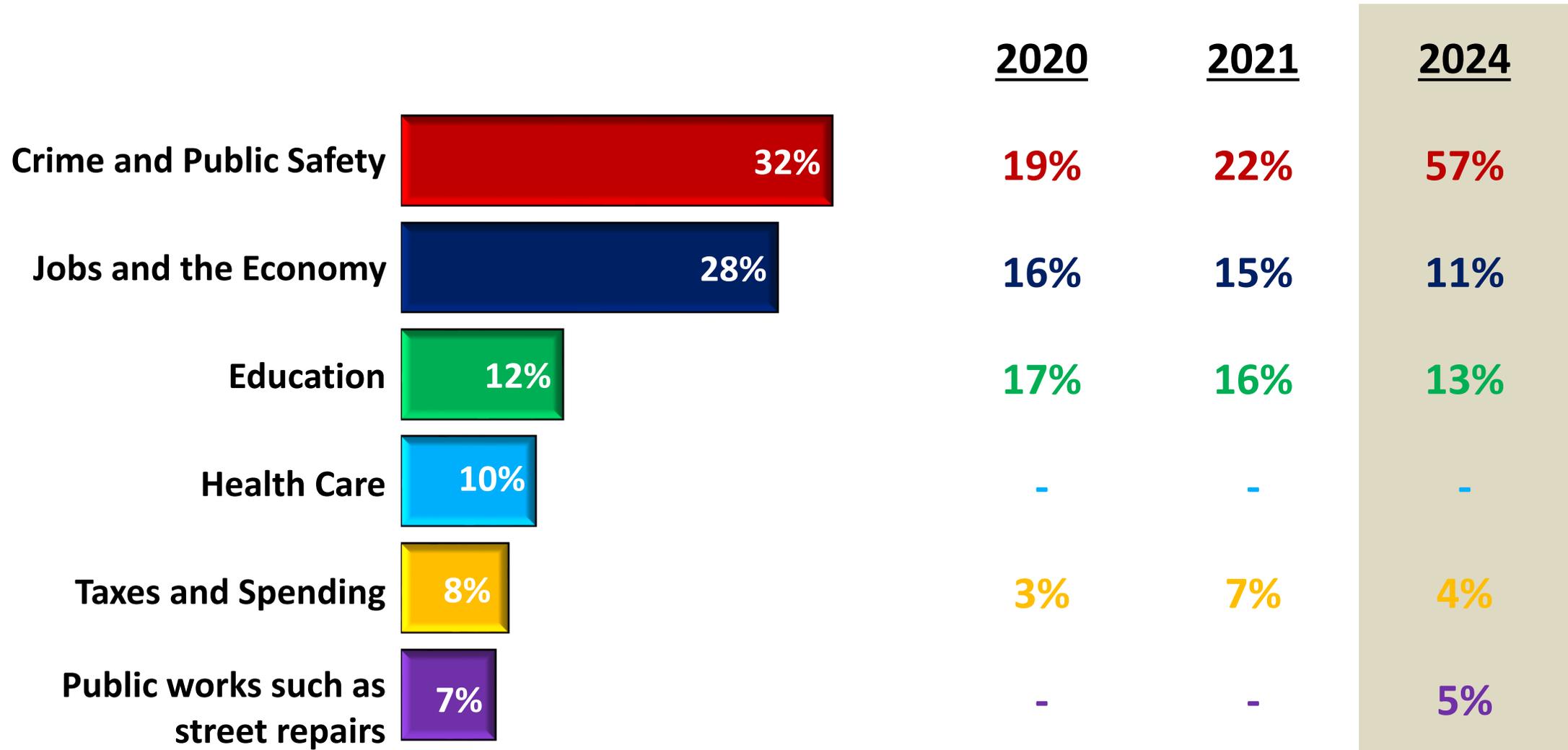
Next, have you ever been a victim of a property crime such as burglary, vehicle theft or vehicle break in?

<u>Trend</u>	<u>1/24</u>	<u>2/26</u>
Yes%	71%	68%

By Subgroup

<i>Subgroups</i>	<i>Violent Crime Victim (yes%)</i>	<i>Property Crime Victim (yes%)</i>
Men	19%	69%
Women	24%	67%
Memphis	27%	67%
Rest Shelby	14%	68%
African-American	24%	64%
White	21%	71%
Non-College	31%	70%
College+	9%	65%

Crime remains the top issue, but more voters name the economy as their top issue.

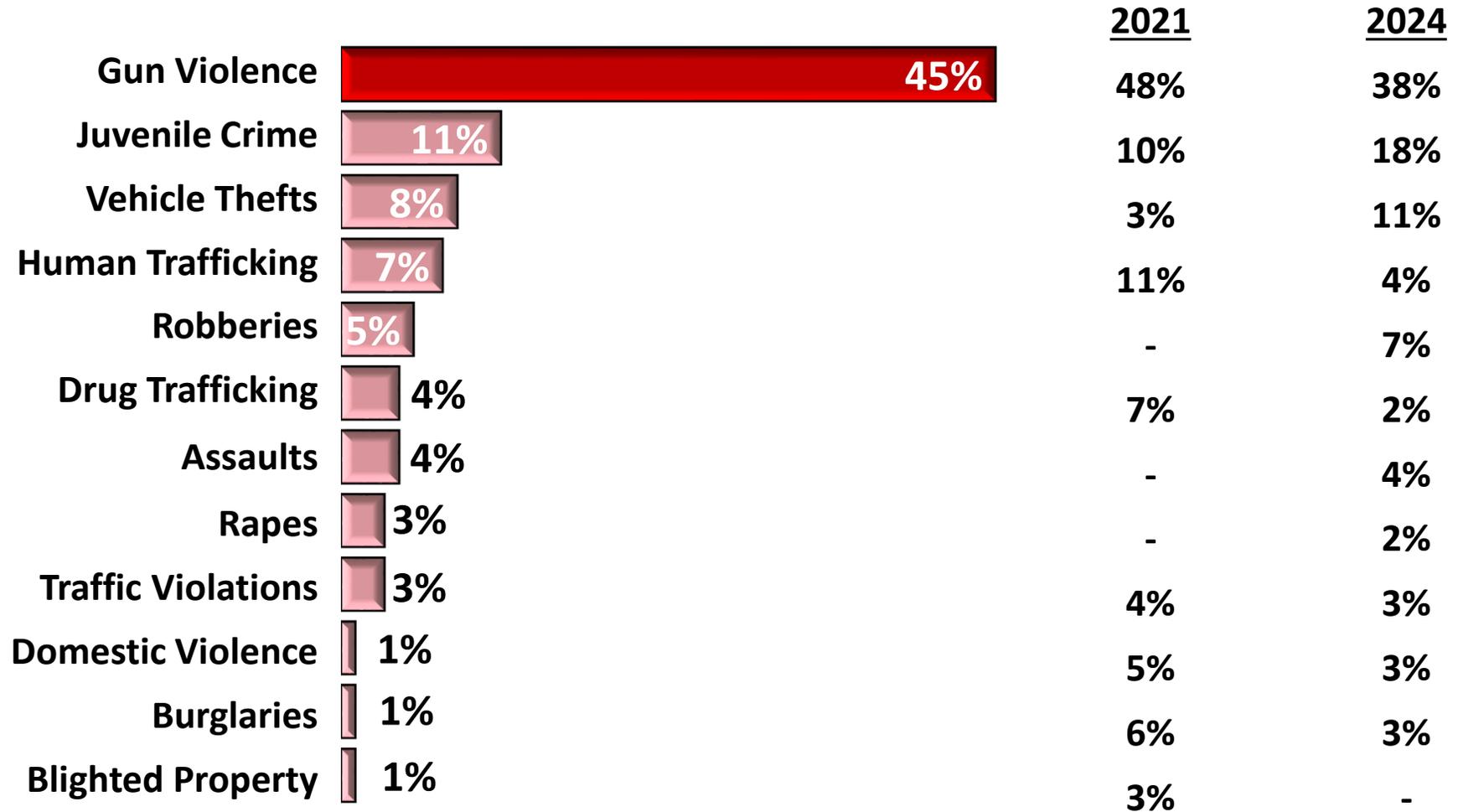


First, which ONE of the following issues do you believe should be the top priority for government leaders? Is it....

Top Issue by Subgroup

<i>Subgroups</i>	<i>Crime and Public Safety</i>	<i>Jobs and the Economy</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Healthcare</i>
Men	37%	29%	9%	8%
Women	29%	27%	15%	11%
Memphis	29%	30%	12%	11%
Rest Shelby	38%	23%	13%	8%
African-American	24%	38%	12%	8%
White	42%	16%	13%	12%
Non-College	33%	28%	8%	10%
College+	32%	27%	19%	9%

Voters continue to name gun violence as the most pressing crime concern.

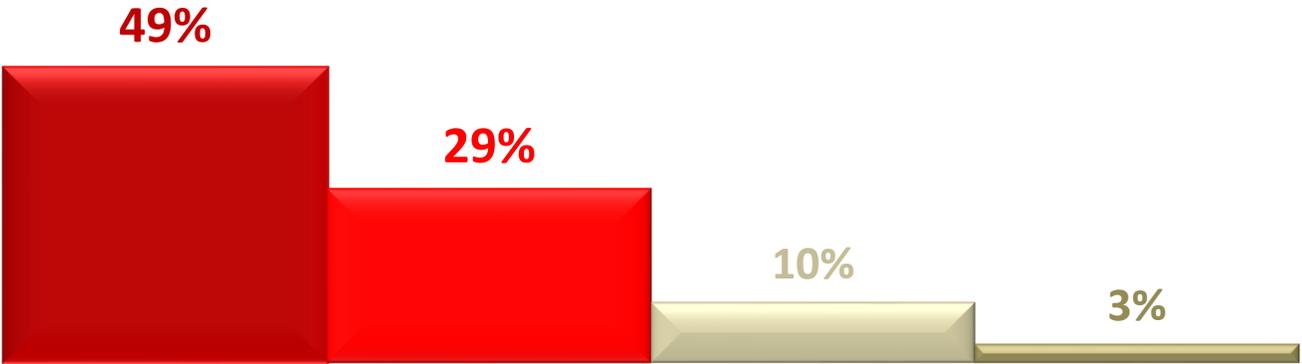


Next, on the issue of crime and public safety, which ONE of the following do you think is the most important to focus on? Is it...

Most voters see truancy as a serious problem.

Total

78% Serious
13% Not Serious



■ Very Serious
 ■ Smt Serious
 ■ Not Too Serious
 ■ Not at All Serious

Subgroups *%Very Serious Problem*

Men	46%
Women	51%
Memphis	51%
Rest Shelby	45%
African-American	55%
White	42%
Non-College	49%
College+	48%

Next, do you believe skipping school, or truancy, is....

Key Findings: Outlook on the Criminal Justice System

#2

Continuing the trend from our 2024 poll, Shelby County voters express dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system across every metric we tested – even as there has been a small improvement in the perception of their own neighborhood’s safety.

- First, 62% of voters say they feel “always” (18%) or “mostly” (44%) safe in their own neighborhood – a four-point improvement from 2024, but far below the 2021 high of 77%. Much of that improvement comes from the suburban areas.
- Still, voters express dissatisfaction with criminal justice offices across several measurements we tested. First, across all subgroups, a wide majority of voters believe the Shelby County District Attorney’s office is too lenient (62% overall), and eight-in-ten (80%) voters say the state court system is too slow.

#2

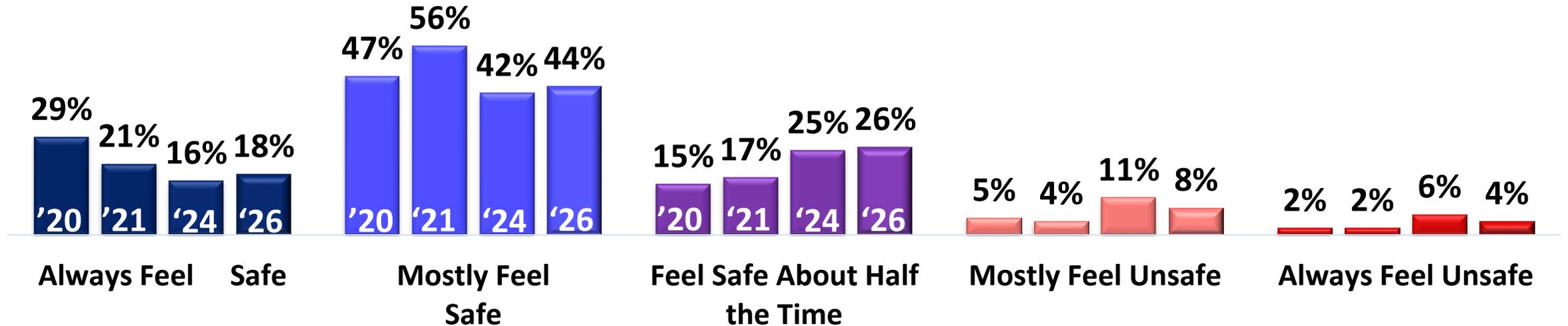
- Next, faith in the system's support for crime victims continues to fall. Just 16% of voters believe crime victims receive "a lot" (4%) or "some" (12%) support and assistance from the criminal justice system. That's a 14-point drop from 2024 and a 24-point drop from 2021. Just 5% of violent crime victims and 3% of property crime victims say they received "a lot" of support/assistance from the criminal justice system. By comparison, 42% of violent crime victims and 47% of property crime victims report receiving "not much support at all."
- Like our last poll, voters overwhelmingly say the local criminal justice system is too lenient toward both juvenile offenders (64%) and adult offenders (63%). This perception is consistent across all major subgroups in the poll.

#2

- Finally, voters have a negative perception of the criminal justice system on four attributes we tested: sharing information with the public (70% fair/poor job), rehabilitating violent offenders (74% fair/poor job), offering employment/assistance to those who completed their sentence (62% fair/poor job), and making public safety THE factor in setting bail amounts (71% fair/poor job).

Modest improvement in neighborhood safety perception, but it's still well below the 2021 high.

<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2026</u>	
76%	77%	58%	62%	Feel Safe
7%	6%	17%	12%	Feel Unsafe



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

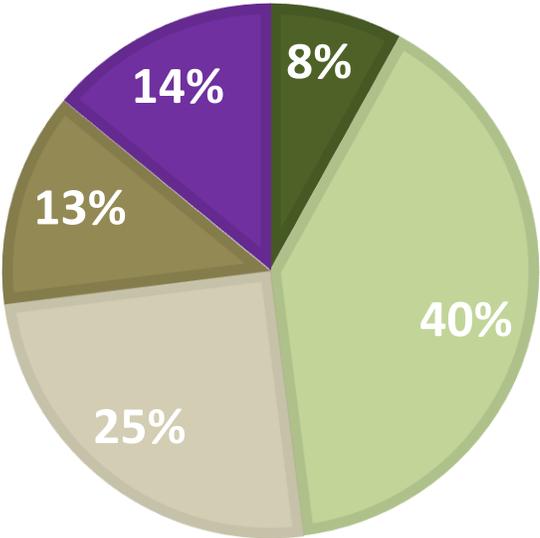
As you might expect, perceptions differ by gender, race, geography and educational attainment.

<i>Subgroups</i>	<i>Feel Safe% 2021</i>	<i>Feel Safe% 2024</i>	<i>Feel Safe% 2026</i>	<i>Feel Unsafe% 2021</i>	<i>Feel Unsafe% 2024</i>	<i>Feel Unsafe% 2026</i>
Men	73%	66%	69%	6%	11%	12%
Women	80%	53%	57%	5%	21%	12%
Memphis	74%	54%	53%	7%	17%	13%
Rest Shelby	83%	67%	77%	4%	16%	10%
African-American	67%	49%	52%	9%	22%	13%
White	87%	68%	72%	2%	11%	9%
Non-College	72%	53%	56%	7%	18%	12%
College+	83%	66%	70%	4%	16%	11%

Since 2021, there has been a significant drop – across all subgroups – in the perceived effectiveness of Neighborhood Watch groups.

<u>2021</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2026</u>	
74%	69%	48%	Effective
22%	29%	37%	Not Effective

- Very Effective
- Somewhat Effective
- Not Too Effective
- Not Effective at All
- Not Sure

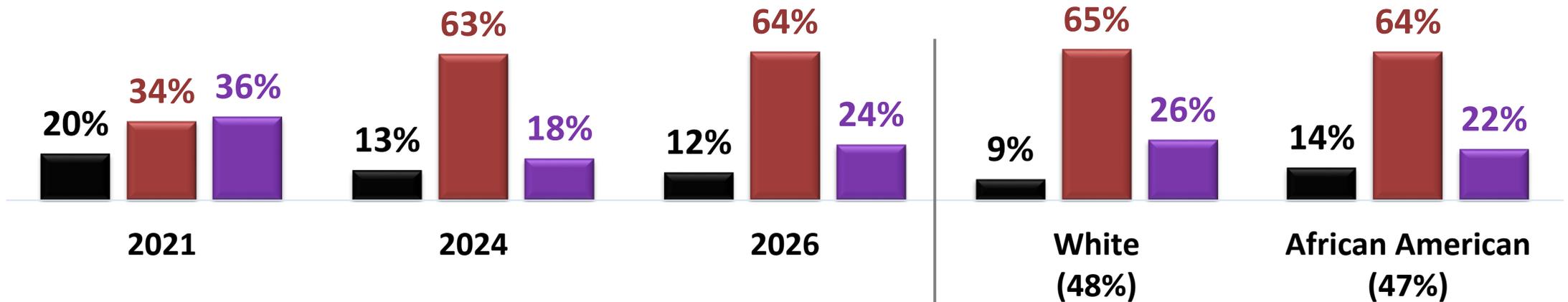


	<i>Effective% – Not Effective%</i>	
	2021	2026
Men	70% - 28%	50% - 37%
Women	77% - 18%	47% - 38%
Memphis	69% - 27%	43% - 44%
Rest Shelby	83% - 13%	57% - 27%
African-American	74% - 23%	46% - 38%
White	74% - 20%	47% - 39%
Non-College	67% - 27%	46% - 41%
College+	81% - 17%	52% - 32%

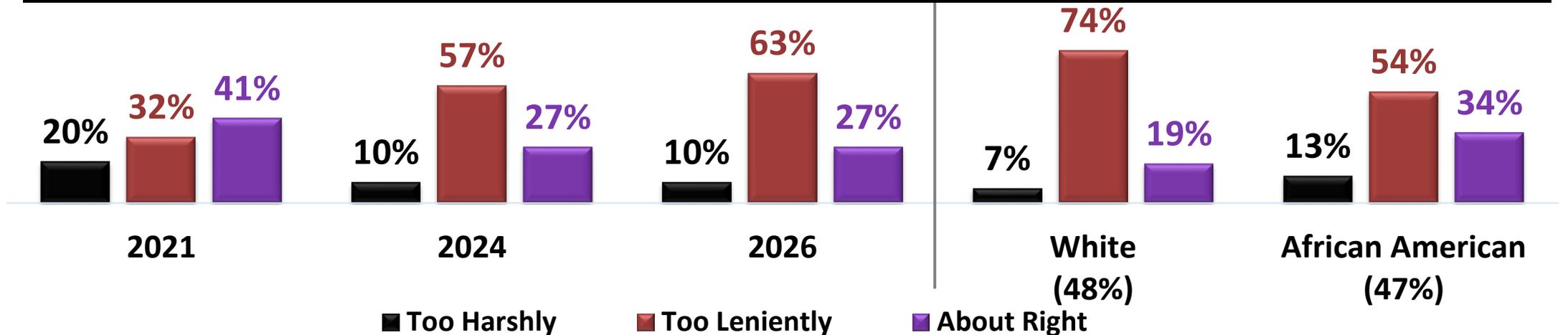
First, how effective do you think community involvement through neighborhood-based groups like Neighborhood Watch are in preventing crime?

Voters continue to perceive the justice system as too lenient on offenders.

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

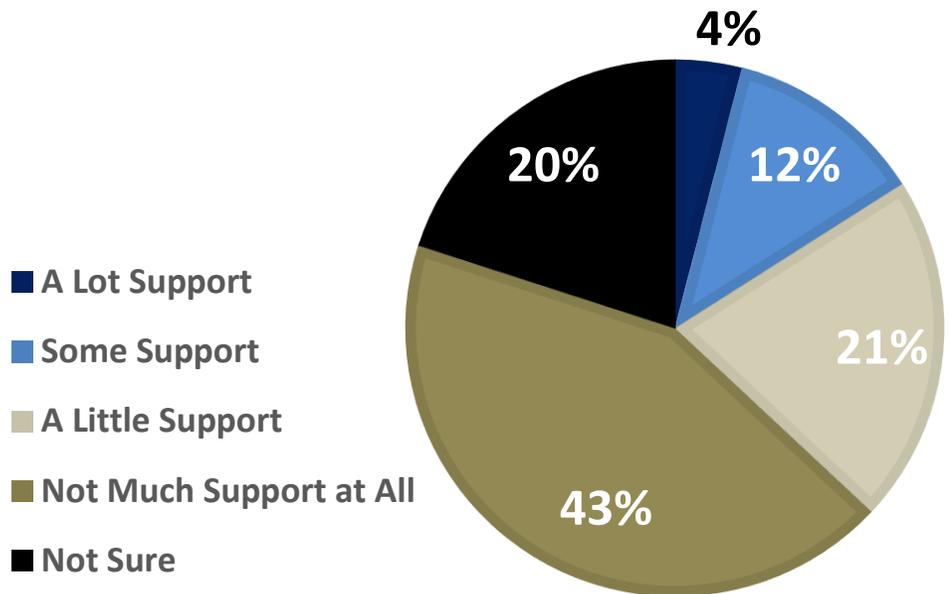


Do you believe the criminal justice system treat ADULTS who commit crimes ...



And, they believe the system offers minimal support to victims.

<u>2021</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2026</u>	
40%	30%	16%	A lot/Some
54%	64%	64%	Little/Not Much

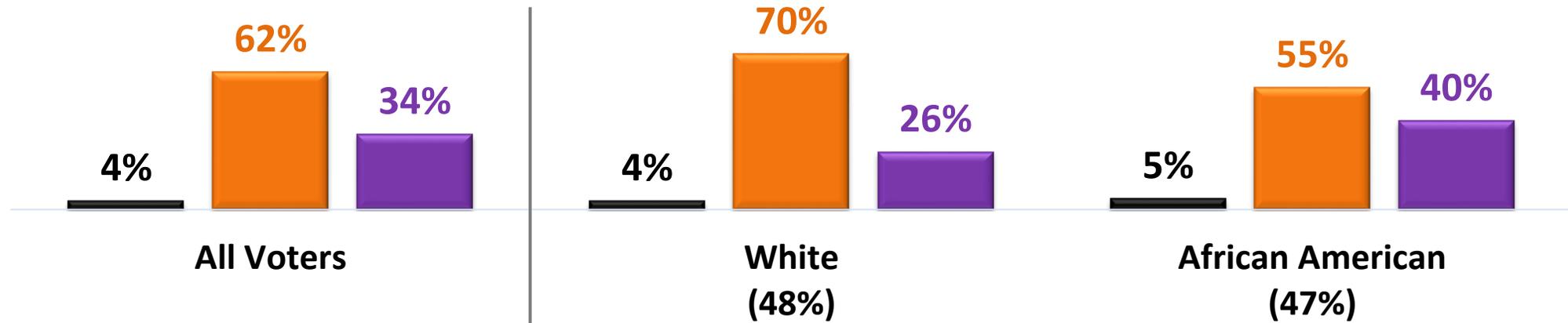


<i>Subgroups (A Lot/Some%)</i>	2021	2024	2026
Men	43%	28%	14%
Women	39%	31%	17%
Memphis	42%	37%	16%
Rest Shelby	37%	27%	16%
African-American	45%	34%	18%
White	36%	27%	13%
Non-College	42%	31%	16%
College+	38%	27%	15%
Violent Crime Victim	n/a	23%	18%
Property Crime Victim	n/a	30%	15%

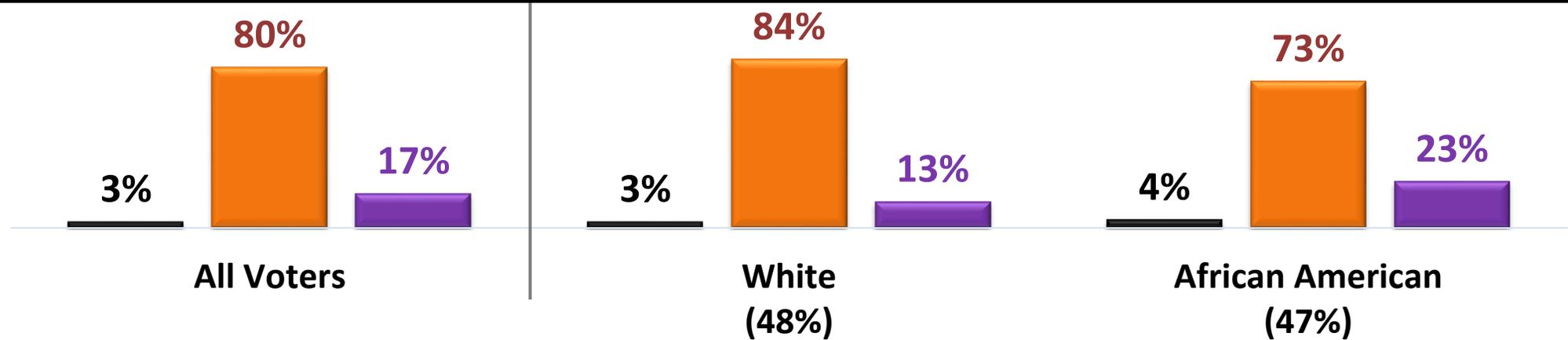
Next, how much support and assistance do you think victims of crime and their families get from the criminal justice system?

Dissatisfaction with the justice system extends to prosecutors (too lenient) and the court system (too slow).

Next, do you believe the Shelby County District Attorney's office is prosecuting those charged with serious crimes...

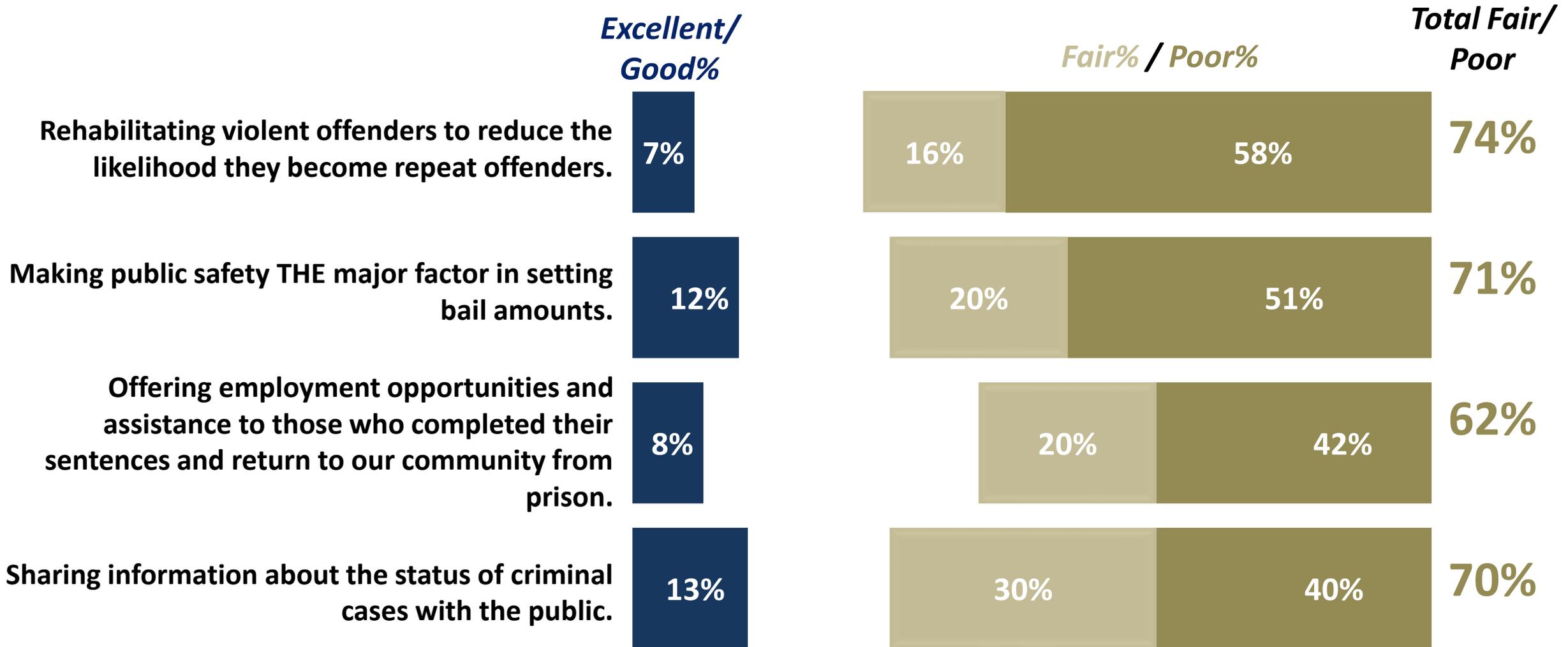


And, do you think our state court system is moving criminal cases along...



■ Too Harshly/Quickly ■ Too Leniently/Slowly ■ About Right

The system receives a failing grade across each of the following specific metric.



Now, please rate the job the criminal justice system in your community is doing on each of the following issues.

Key Findings: Local Police Job Performance

#3

Views on the criminal justice system continued to be negative, but the standing of local police rebounded from 2024. Today, 63% of voters rate the performance of local police as “excellent” (17%) or “good” (45%) – a 12-point improvement from the 2024 poll.

The job rating for local police improved with every subgroup in the poll, with double-digit improvements in the “excellent/good” rating among men (+16), unaffiliated voters (+18), voters outside of Memphis (+14), seniors (+18) and college-educated voters (+15).

Significant differences remain by race, generation and geography; the “excellent/good” rating for local police is higher among whites (75%) than African-Americans (49%); seniors (73%) than 18-34 yr olds (49%); and voters outside of Memphis (83%) than Memphis residents (50%).

#3

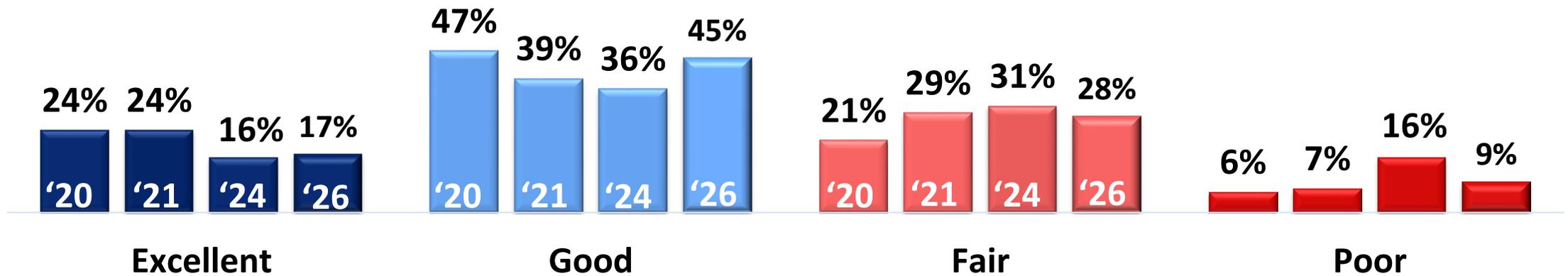
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While voters continue to overwhelmingly agree with the statements, *“I respect local law enforcement”* and *“I would like an increased law enforcement presence in my neighborhood,”* there has been modest erosion on both statements with voters across demographic subgroups:

- *“I respect local law enforcement”* (86% agree from 93% in '24, the lowest recorded in our four polls).
- *“I would like an increased law enforcement presence in my neighborhood”* (68% total agree from 75% in '24).

Local police job performance rating rebounded from the 2024 low.

<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2026</u>	
71%	62%	51%	63%	Excellent/Good
27%	36%	47%	37%	Fair/Poor

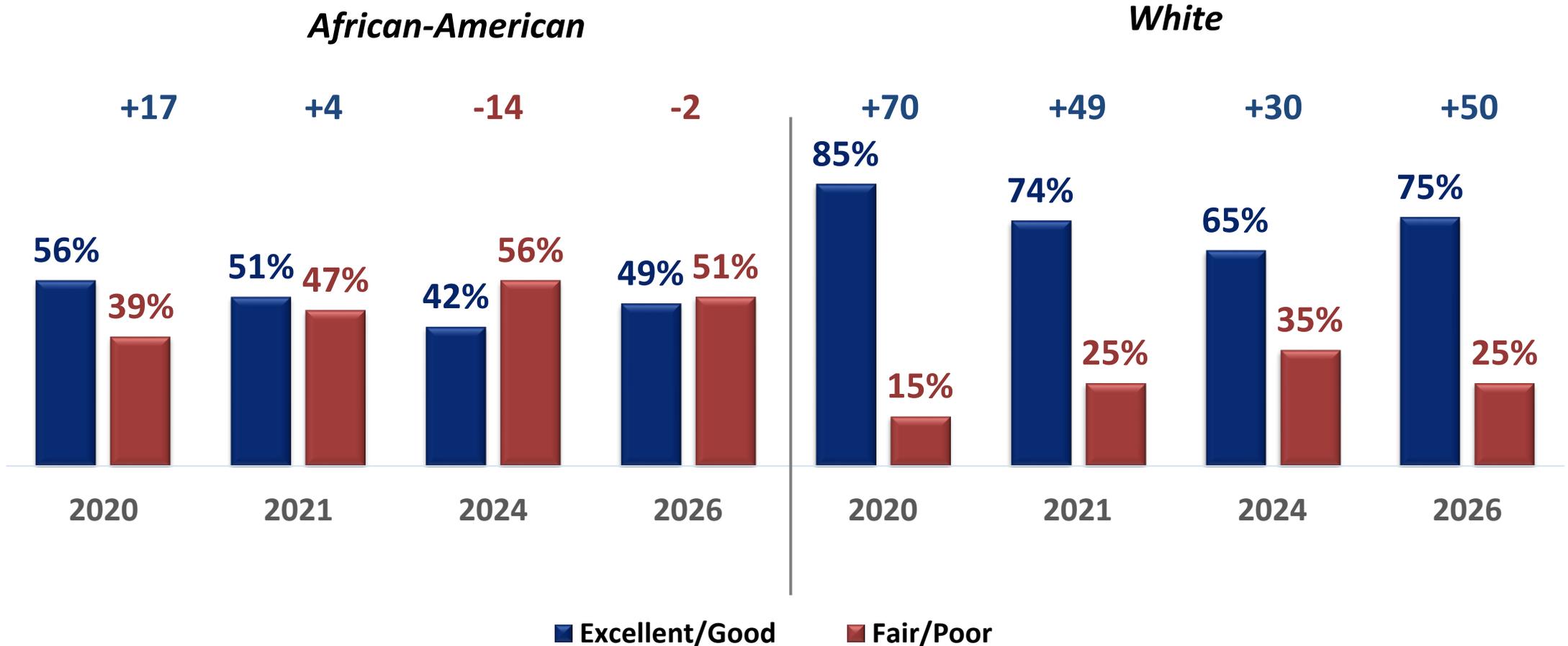


How would you rate the job your local police are doing in your neighborhood?

Would you say...

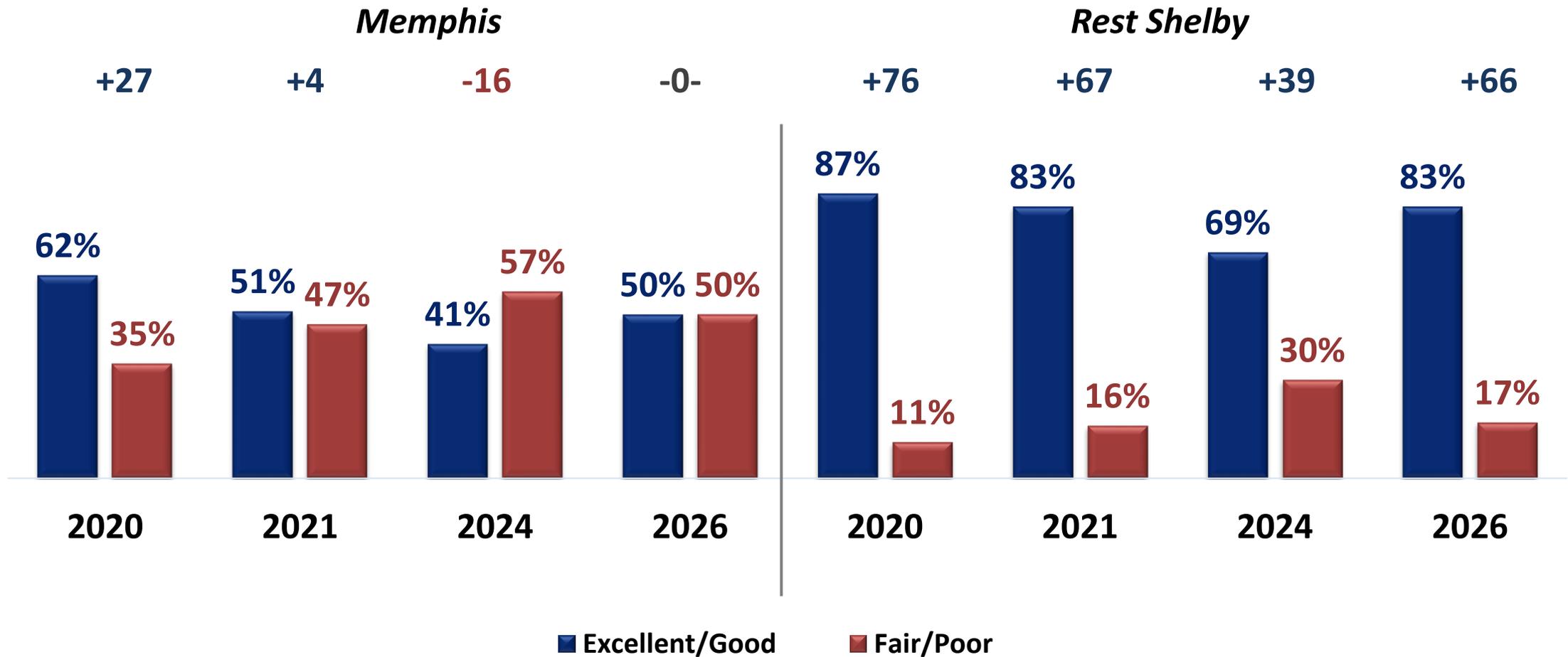
While differences remain, the ratings for local police improved with white voters and African-American voters...

Local Police Performance by Race



...in the city and the suburbs...

Local Police Performance by Geography



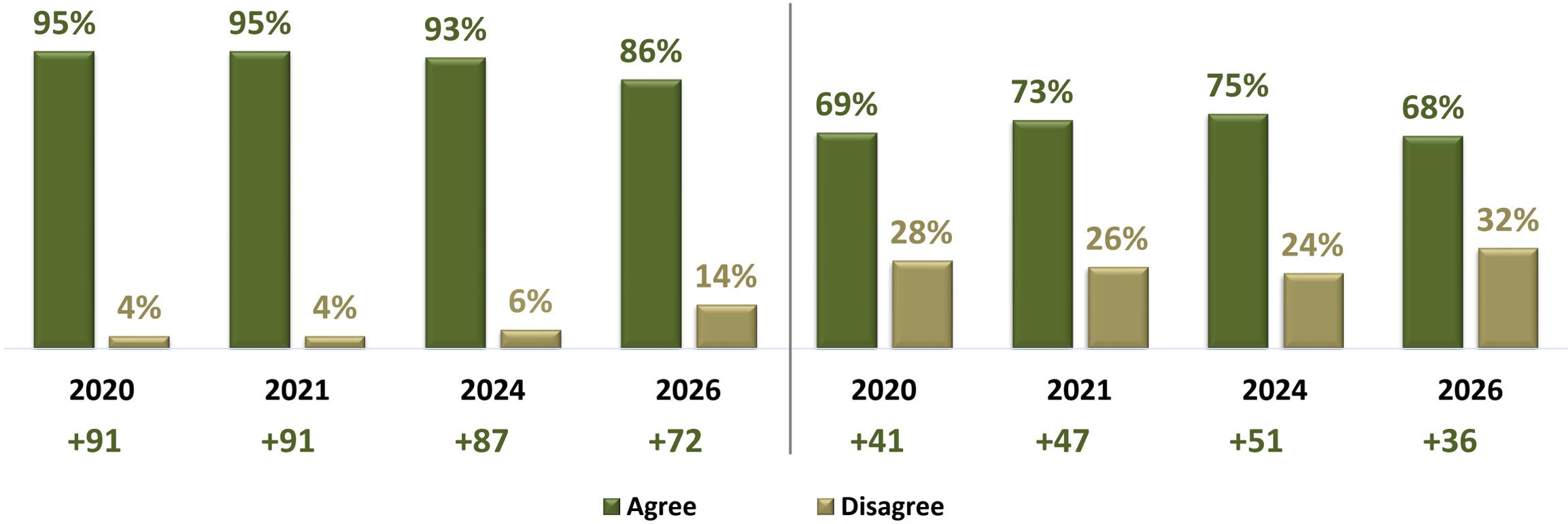
...and, across age groups.

Date	18-34 yrs (24%)	35-44 yrs (17%)	45-54 yrs (15%)	55-64 yrs (18%)	65 yrs+ (26%)
2020	77%-21%	72%-26%	66%-31%	69%-28%	70%-28%
2021	44%-53%	52%-47%	65%-35%	70%-29%	80%-18%
2024	38%-62%	48%-50%	59%-40%	64%-36%	55%-40%
2026	49%-51%	56%-44%	59%-41%	76%-24%	73%-27%

While the overall job rating for local police improved, but there has been erosion on the following statements we tracked since 2020.

“I respect my local law enforcement”

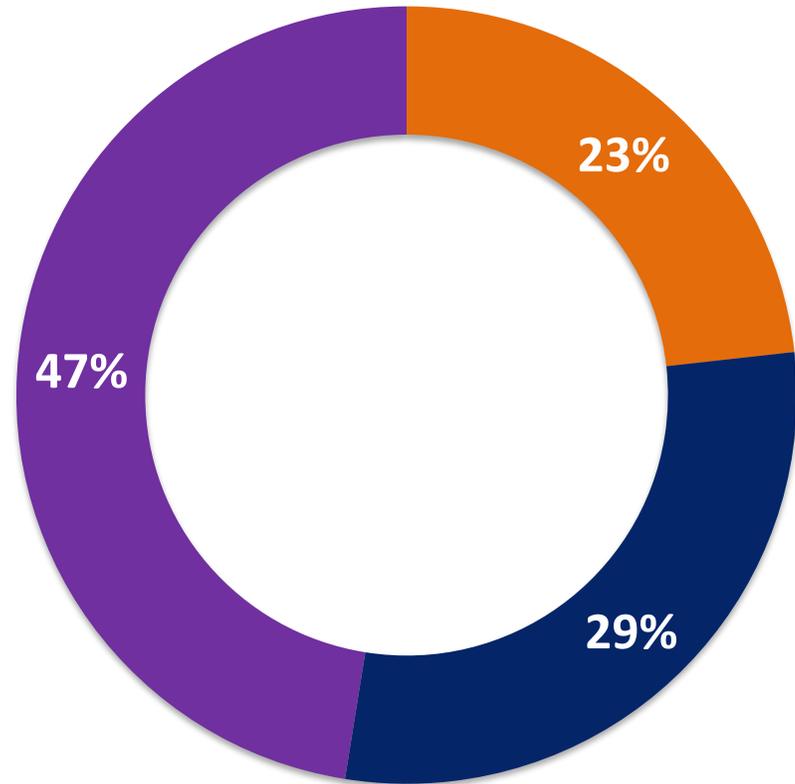
“I would like an increased law enforcement presence in my neighborhood.”



Statements by Subgroup

Total Agree%	I respect my local law enforcement.				I would like an increased local law enforcement presence in my neighborhood.			
	2020	2021	2024	2026	2020	2021	2024	2026
Men	95%	93%	92%	89%	67%	71%	74%	73%
Women	95%	97%	94%	85%	70%	74%	76%	64%
Memphis	94%	95%	93%	83%	70%	78%	79%	72%
Rest Shelby	96%	96%	94%	92%	66%	65%	69%	61%
Af-American	93%	95%	95%	84%	74%	78%	79%	70%
White	98%	94%	92%	87%	65%	68%	72%	66%
Non-College	93%	94%	94%	86%	75%	79%	78%	71%
College+	96%	97%	92%	87%	62%	68%	72%	64%

A plurality of voters support the status quo deployment of state troopers.



- Fewer State Troopers
- More State Troopers
- Keep about the same number we currently have

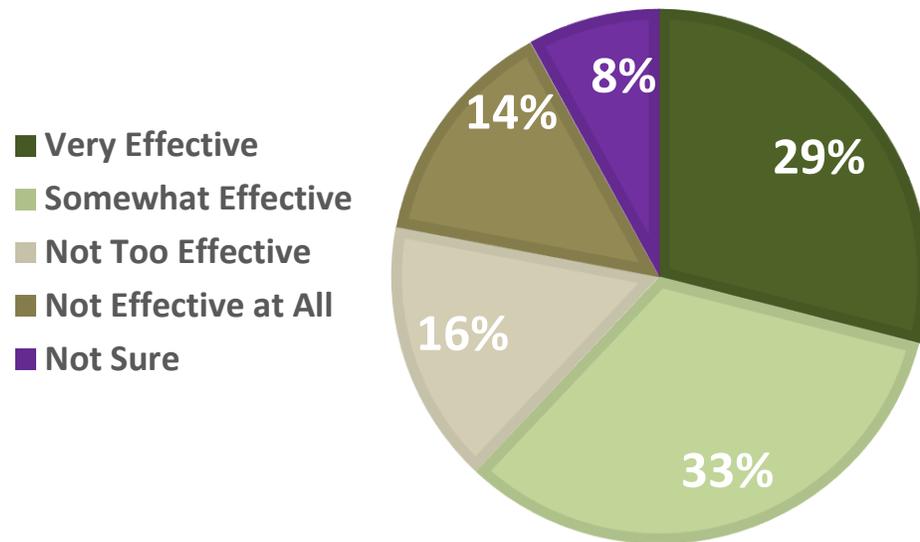
<i>Subgroups</i>	<i>%More - %Fewer - %About Same</i>
Men	34% - 22% - 44%
Women	26% - 25% - 50%
Memphis	27% - 27% - 45%
Rest Shelby	32% - 18% - 50%
African-American	23% - 25% - 52%
White	37% - 19% - 44%
Non-College	28% - 23% - 49%
College+	31% - 24% - 45%

Next, the state of Tennessee has increased the number of state troopers in our community. Do you think we need...

Overall, voters believe the Memphis Safe Task Force is reducing crime in the county...

Total

62% **Effective**
30% **Not Effective**

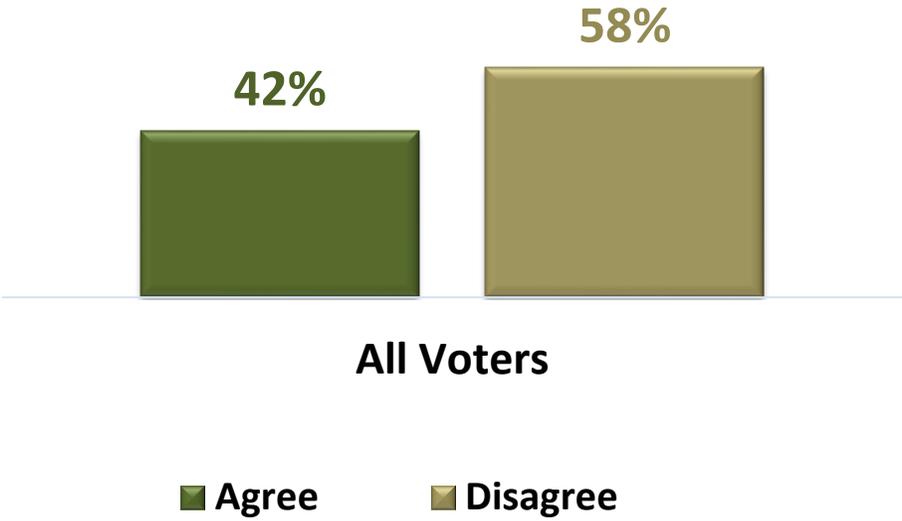


Effective% – Not Effective%

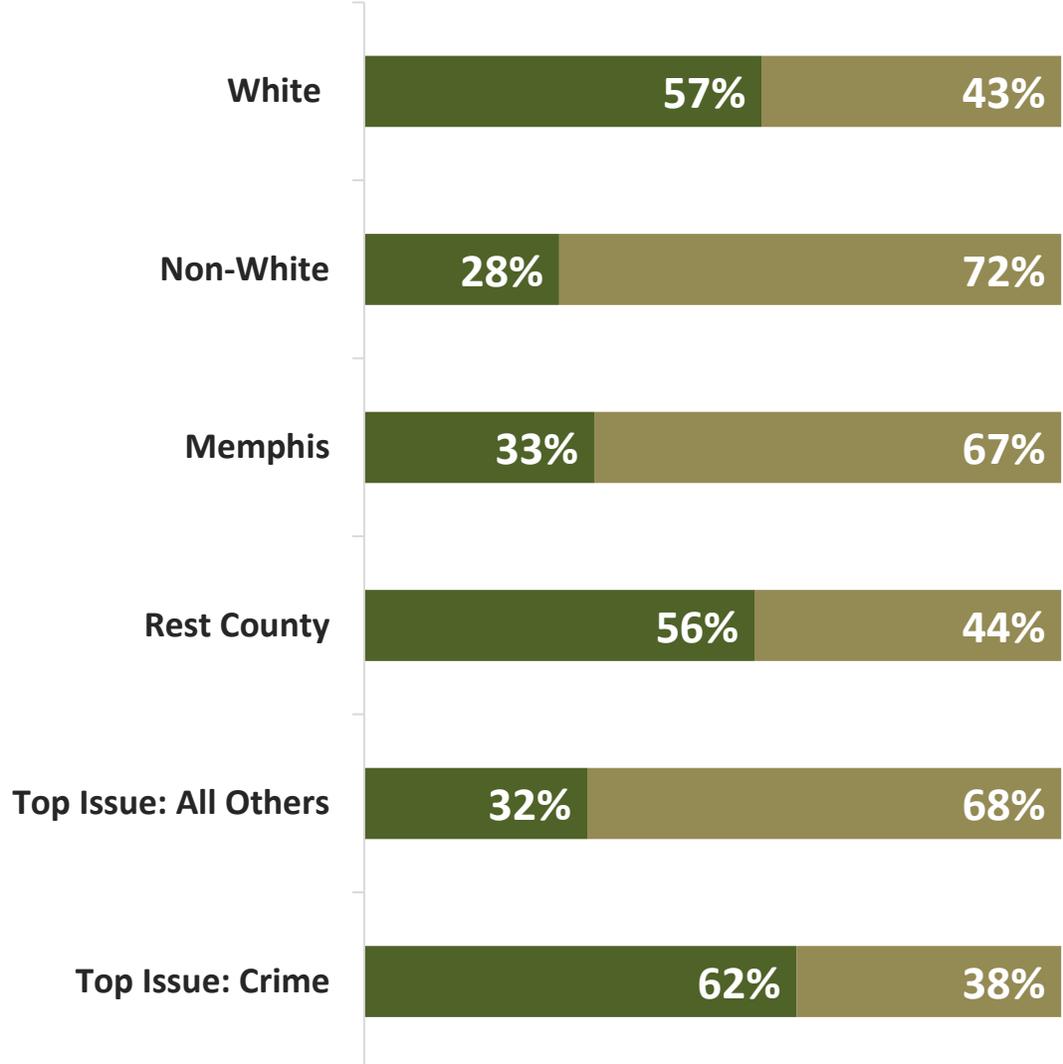
Men	69% - 25%
Women	57% - 34%
Memphis	55% - 36%
Rest Shelby	73% - 21%
African-American	51% - 38%
White	70% - 25%
Non-College	61% - 32%
College+	64% - 27%

Next, the Memphis Safe Task Force has resulted in more federal and state law enforcement resources in Memphis. How effective do you think the Task Force has been in preventing and reducing crime?

...but immigration enforcement splits the county by race, geography and issue priority.



AGREE/DISAGREE:
“The recent crackdown on undocumented immigrants has made our community safer”



Key Findings: Policy Proposals

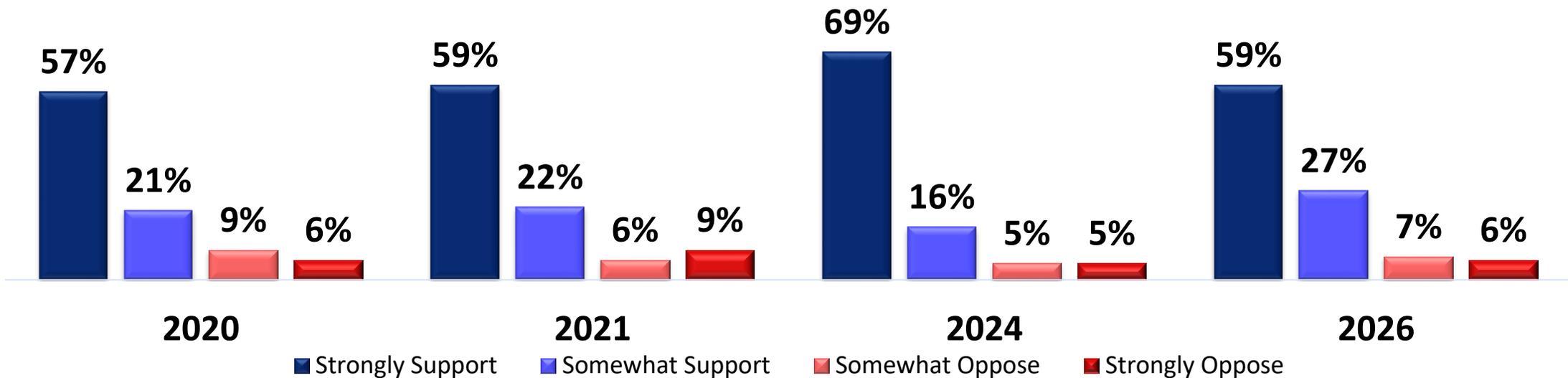
#4

For the fourth straight poll, an overwhelming majority (86%) of Shelby County voters support hiring more police officers. Indeed, support for hiring more cops reached a record high in this survey.

In addition, over three-quarters (77%) of voters support building a new jail. Support for building a new jail tops 70% with nearly all major subgroups.

There remains overwhelming support for hiring more police officers.

2020	2021	2024	2026	
78%	81%	84%	86%	TOTAL SUPPORT
15%	15%	10%	14%	TOTAL OPPOSE



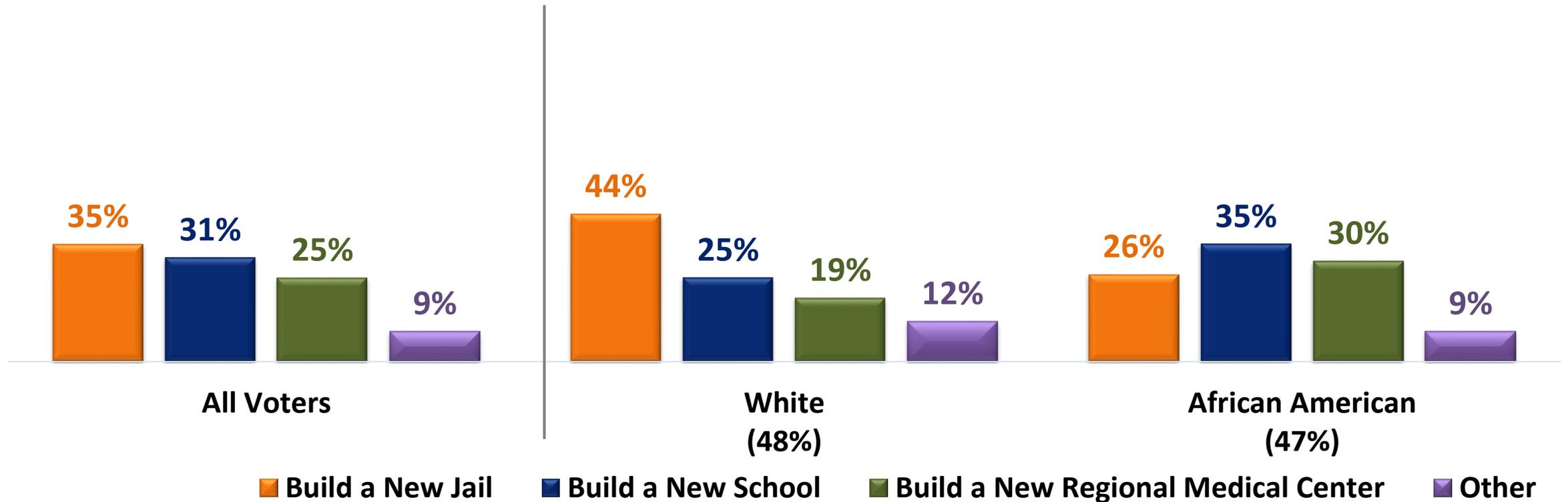
And, would you support or oppose hiring more local police officers?

Support for hiring more police officers cuts across all subgroups.

<i>Subgroups</i>	<i>Total Support% – Total Oppose%</i>
Men	90% - 10%
Women	84% - 16%
Memphis	86% - 14%
Rest Shelby	87% - 13%
African-American	83% - 17%
White	88% - 12%
Non-College	84% - 16%
College+	89% - 11%

While voters split on funding priorities...

Next, local governments often have to prioritize new construction projects. While all of the following projects are important, please tell me which ONE of the following you think is most important to fund?



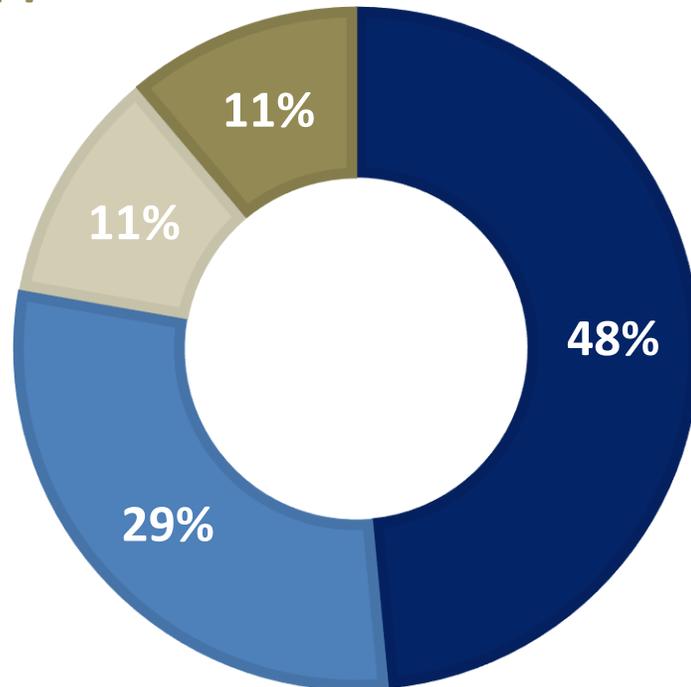
Across every subgroup, there is strong support for building a new jail.

Total

77% Total Support

23% Total Oppose

- Strongly Support
- Somewhat Support
- Somewhat Oppose
- Strongly Oppose



Subgroups

%Support - %Oppose

Men	83% - 17%
Women	73% - 27%
Memphis	75% - 25%
Rest Shelby	81% - 19%
African-American	70% - 30%
White	82% - 18%
Non-College	76% - 24%
College+	80% - 20%

Next, do you support or oppose building a new jail to replace the current one at 201 Poplar?

Take Away Points

- ✓ **Crime no longer dominates the issue agenda but there is plenty of evidence that crime remains a “hot issue” with county voters.**
- ✓ **Dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system remains deep. Nearly every subgroup of voters offers a negative assessment across a broad array of institutions including prosecutors, the courts, rehabilitation programs, and victims’ support with one exception. It is too lenient, too slow, and offers too little support to both victims and those released back into the community.**
- ✓ **Local police officers are the lone exception to the negative assessment. The job performance rating for local cops is positive and has rebounded from the 2024 low. While differences remain by demographic subgroups such as race and age, nearly every subgroup is more positive toward police performance than they were in 2024.**
- ✓ **Indeed, there is a clear support for robust law enforcement presence in the county. Frustrations with the criminal justice system is more about what’s happening in the office buildings than what’s happening on the streets.**