

Democrats have switched their campaign messaging from defund the police to refund the police for this year's midterm elections, but party insiders warn that voters won't easily forget the anti-law-enforcement rhetoric if they don't feel safe in their neighborhoods.

Across the country, waves of violent crime have pushed through neighborhoods, leaving communities distressed and police often paralyzed by lenient criminal justice policies from left-wing prosecutors and other elected leaders.

Democratic lawmakers insisting that they do not support slashing police budgets is not enough to establish crime-fighting credibility with voters, said veteran Democratic political consultant Hank Sheinkopf.

"What the left has done is disturb the balance," he told *The Washington Times*. "The truth is that even liberals [who vote] don't like to have guns pointed in their faces. They're either going to walk or they're going to vote differently, or they're not going to vote."

Whether those voters move to safer congressional districts or stop voting in lockstep with Democrats, it's bad for the party, he said.

He noted that elected leaders have defunded law enforcement agencies often through budget appropriations, not based on public discussion.

"In New York, they're at the lowest level of detectives in 20 or so years. They're down thousands of patrol officers, thousands of correction officers," said Mr. Sheinkopf. "They've defunded probation by cutting its numbers down from 900 to about 600. Now, what to do with 10,000 warrants outstanding? I mean, what do people think is going to happen?"

Atlanta-based Democratic political consultant Tony Lucadamo said Democrats are caught up in contradictory rhetoric.

"Democrats are trying to do a lot of things at once when talking about public safety. The end result is that what's coming out is pretty amorphous, and it's giving voters a hard time ... trying to latch onto exactly what their message is right now," he said. "In Atlanta, that's certainly the case, and it's the case, in a lot of places."

Nine U.S. cities reported record homicide rates last year. For the first time in a decade, homicides in New York City crept toward 500. The year-end total was 486 homicides, compared with 468 in 2020.

In Chicago, police said a total of 797 people were killed in the city, 25 more than in 2020. The number has not been that high since 1996, when it reached 798.

Males accounted for 88% of homicide deaths,” the medical examiner’s office said in a statement to the Chicago Tribune. “Eighty-six homicide deaths were under 18; 12 were under the age of 10.”

Los Angeles reported 397 homicides, an 11.8% spike from 355 in 2020 and a 53.9% increase from 258 in 2019. The number of homicides has not been that high since 395 back in 2007.

According to the FBI’s year-end statistics, 73 law enforcement officers died in the line of duty. Not including the 9/11 attacks, that is the most killed since 1995.

President Biden, who is meeting Thursday with New York Mayor Eric Adams to tout efforts to combat gun crimes, is suffering in polls. Most Americans do not approve of his handling of crime.

The president’s struggles were underscored when White House press secretary Jen Psaki shrugged off criticism that he was soft on crime during a recent appearance on “Pod Save America.”

Ms. Psaki clarified her remarks at a White House press briefing this week

“What I was speaking to was a chyron on Fox News, since you raised it, which suggested this administration is soft on crime with no basis,” Ms. Psaki said.

She credited the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package, which passed Congress last March without Republican support, that bolstered law enforcement.

“There was additional funding to support local [Community Oriented Policing Services] programs, something that every single Republican voted against. I said in that interview that I know they don’t like you when we call that out. I’m going to keep calling that out because that’s a fact,” Ms. Psaki said. “Also, President Biden has proposed a significant increase in funding for local COPS programs in his budget, more than the prior president. That’s a fact.

“So if those facts are uncomfortable, I’m sorry for people who feel they need to be critical, but the president has been a longtime advocate of addressing crime. He’s never been for defunding the police,” she said.

The far-left wing of the Democratic Party took up the defund-the-police mantra in the wake of racial justice protests in 2020. The pressure campaign from some Democratic lawmakers,

their allies on Capitol Hill and organizations such as Black Lives Matter led to budget cuts at some police departments.

Although the budget cuts were considered victories for liberals, Democratic incumbents suffered at the ballot box in 2020. Republicans blamed the spike in crime on any candidate with a D next to their name, tying the entire party to the defund-the-police movement.

The strategy worked. It contributed to nearly a dozen election losses for House Democrats.

The party's leaders, including Mr. Biden and House Majority Whip James E. Clyburn of South Carolina, attempted and, to a large extent, succeeded in steering the national party away from the anti-police rhetoric.

That hasn't stopped far-left leaders in some cities and states from enacting bail reforms, no-prosecution policies for low-level offenses and reduced sentences for convicts.

New York City-based Democratic political consultant Roy Moskowitz blamed the "Republican media machine" with pigeonholing their opponents as soft on crime. Otherwise, he said, it should not be difficult for Democrats to merge messages of public safety and criminal justice reform.

"I think you could say you're for public safety on both ends: public safety to protect from crime and to protect people from being pursued for no reason, criminally inappropriately. I think that's not that complex," said Mr. Moskowitz. "The problem is, again, you have a relentless Republican media machine."