

October 13, 2022



**TO:** Brian Tashman, ACLU  
**FROM:** Betsy App, Change Research  
**RE:** Results of Alamance County Poll

Change Research surveyed 335 likely general election voters in Alamance County, NC from September 29-October 3, 2022<sup>1</sup>. The survey probed attitudes and opinions related to law enforcement, criminal justice and immigration in order to inform a voter education campaign around the Alamance County Sheriff's race.

- Republican Sheriff Terry Johnson leads Democratic challenger Kelly White by 16 points in the race for Alamance County Sheriff.
- Johnson is well-known and well-liked. White is relatively unknown.
- Unaffiliated women, unaffiliated men ages 50+, and Republican women under 50 are most likely to shift their support away from Johnson, toward White in the face of information-based messaging on the candidates.
- Moveable voters are most concerned about Johnson's anti-immigrant, anti-Latinx attitudes and behaviors, as well as the poor jail conditions in which people have died of drug overdoses.

Below are the key findings.

### **Kelly White faces strong headwinds**

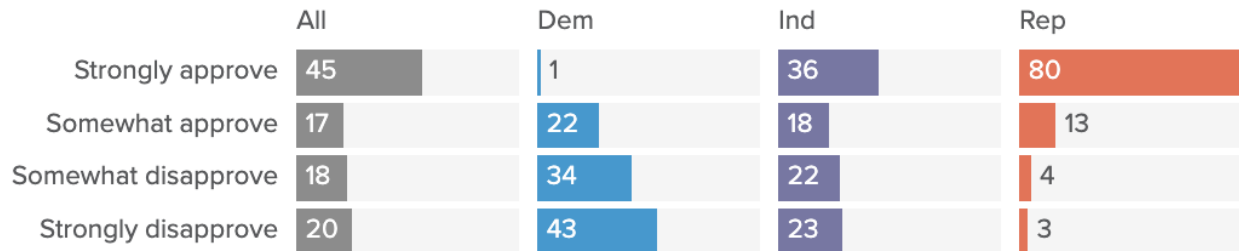
**Five weeks before Election Day, Sheriff Terry Johnson leads Kelly White by 16 points.** Johnson gets 54% of the vote, White 38%, with 7% undecided. Alamance County is a challenging environment for Democrats in 2022. At the top of the ticket, Cheri Beasley trails Ted Budd by 10 points, 40% to Budd's 50%, underperforming Biden's margin among likely 2022 voters here (Biden 45%/Trump 50%).

**Johnson is well-known and well-liked.** Just 7% of likely voters say they've never heard of Terry Johnson, and half (49%) hold a favorable opinion of him, including 42% who say they feel very favorably toward the sheriff. Only a third (33%) hold an unfavorable opinion.

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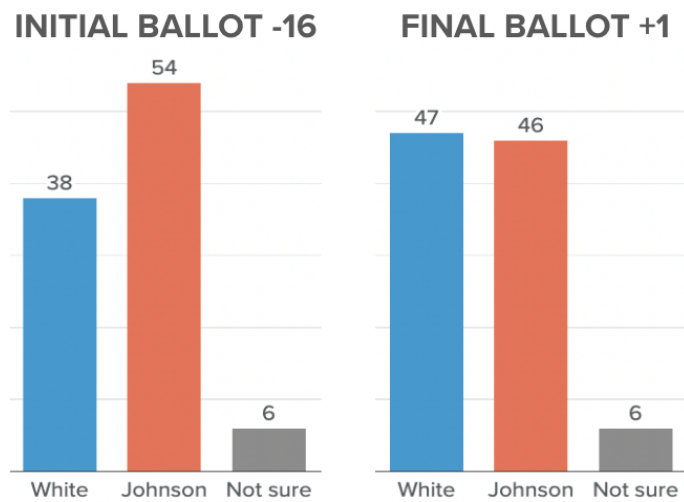
<sup>1</sup> Respondents were recruited into an online survey instrument via Dynamic Online Sampling (targeted online advertisements) to obtain a sample representative of likely voters in Alamance County. Post-stratification weighting was performed on age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and 2020 presidential vote. Weighting parameters were based on voter file data.

Similarly, a strong majority (62%) of Alamance County voters approve of the job Johnson is doing as sheriff, 38% disapprove.



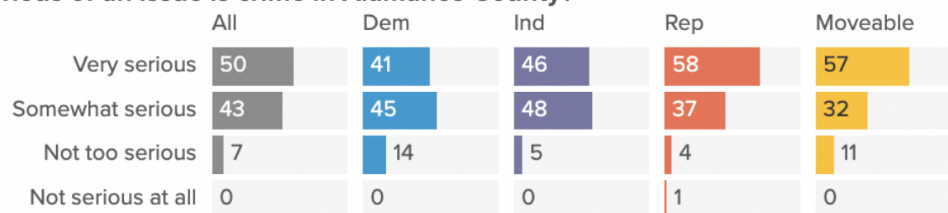
### Information-based messaging on the candidates closes the margin

The race is tied (47% White, 46% Johnson) after the messaging batteries. The voters most primed to shift their support away from Johnson, toward White in the face of messaging ("moveable" voters) are those who are not initial White supporters but who 1) hold a negative opinion of Johnson, 2) disapprove of Johnson's job as sheriff, or 3) prefer a compassionate approach to criminal justice ("Low-level, nonviolent crimes should be resolved outside the jail system") over a zero tolerance approach.



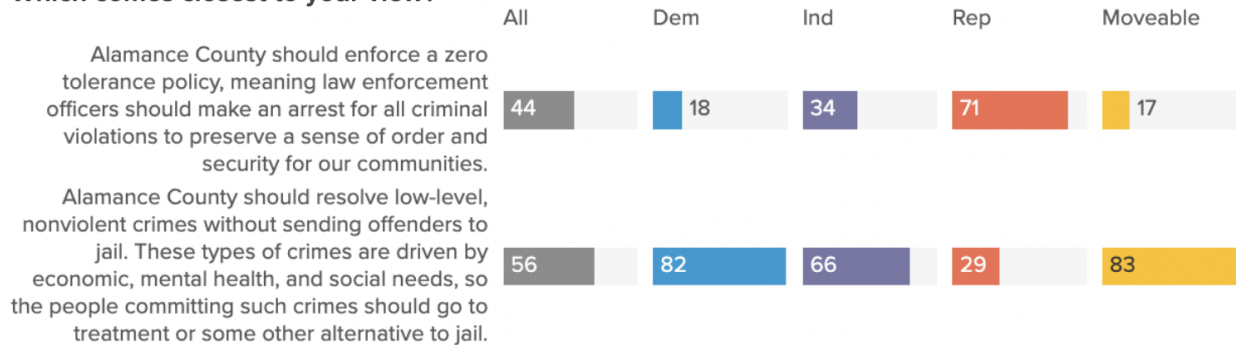
An overwhelming majority (93%) of voters in Alamance County perceive crime as a serious issue. This is true of voters across the partisan spectrum, and of moveable voters (89% of moveable voters say crime is a serious issue, including a majority—57%—who say it is a very serious issue).

### In your opinion, how serious of an issue is crime in Alamance County?



Alamance County voters are divided, however, in terms of how they would like to see crime addressed. Democratic voters, unaffiliated voters and, importantly, movable voters prefer a compassionate approach over zero tolerance.

### Which comes closest to your view?



Information that highlights the disconnect between Sheriff Johnson’s approach to criminal justice and movable voters’ preferred approach is instrumental in closing the margin between the two candidates.

### Candidate information that resonates with movable voters

Movable voters are most concerned about Sheriff Johnson's anti-immigrant, anti-Latinx attitudes and behaviors, including:

- Three-quarters (75%) are concerned about Johnson’s history of discriminatory policing, including 62% who say this raises very serious concerns. *Sheriff Terry Johnson has disproportionately stopped and arrested nonwhite drivers, using checkpoints to arrest those suspected of an immigration violation. He has instructed his officers, "If you stop a Mexican, don't write a citation, arrest him."*
- 77% are concerned about individual stories in which Johnson’s actions harmed mothers and children - *Sheriff Terry Johnson used the 287(g) partnership with ICE to arrest a Latina mother and left her two children on the side of the road overnight. He also arrested an Alamance County librarian who was brought to America decades ago as a toddler and was now seeking prenatal care.*
- 70% find Johnson’s expressions of racism concerning. *Sheriff Terry Johnson and his staff used anti-immigrant slurs during official department business, calling Latino residents "taco eaters." In a staff meeting the Sheriff demanded "bring me some Mexicans" while pounding his fists on a table.*

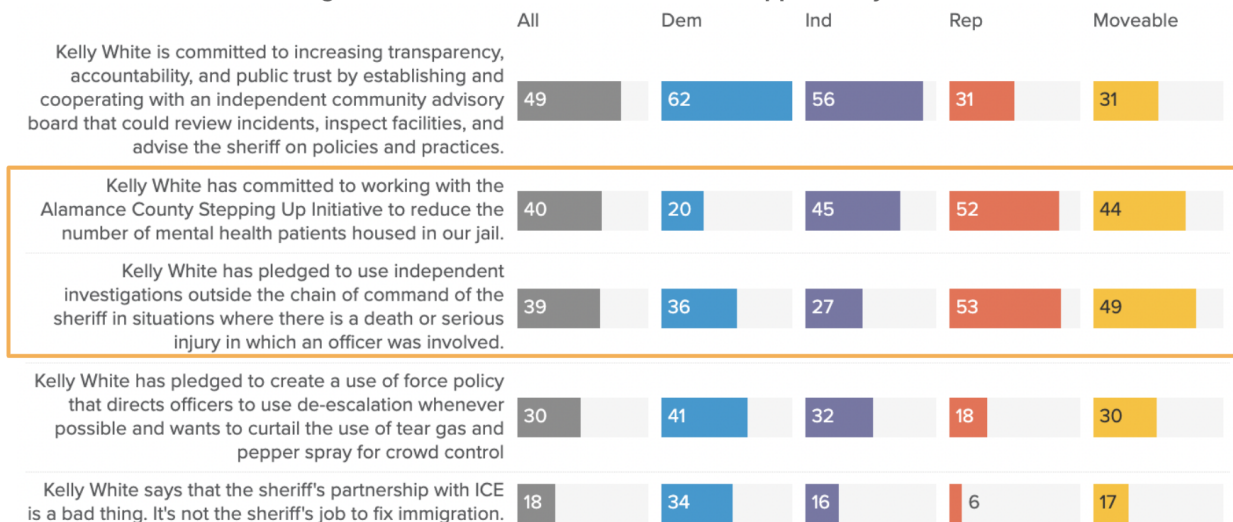
They are also concerned about poor jail conditions on Sheriff Johnson’s watch, including people who have died of drug overdoses.

Movable voters are less concerned (or even unconcerned) about Sheriff Johnson's treatment of protesters. Messaging around protests may have the unintended consequence of shifting voters' support to Johnson over White. For example, half (52%) of all voters have no concerns or only minor concerns about Johnson trying to prohibit protests to remove a statue of a confederate soldier by threatening arrests (40% no concerns, 12% only minor concerns)..

Regarding Kelly White, movable voters say they are concerned about his relative lack of experience in this moment of rising crime. Two-thirds (67%) say this is a convincing reason to support Terry Johnson.

Moveable voters' top reason to vote for White is his pledge to use independent investigations in situations involving death or serious injury in which an officer was involved, with half (49%) selecting this as the best reason to support him, and 44% citing his commitment to working with the Stepping up Initiative to help keep individuals with mental health patients out of the jail system.

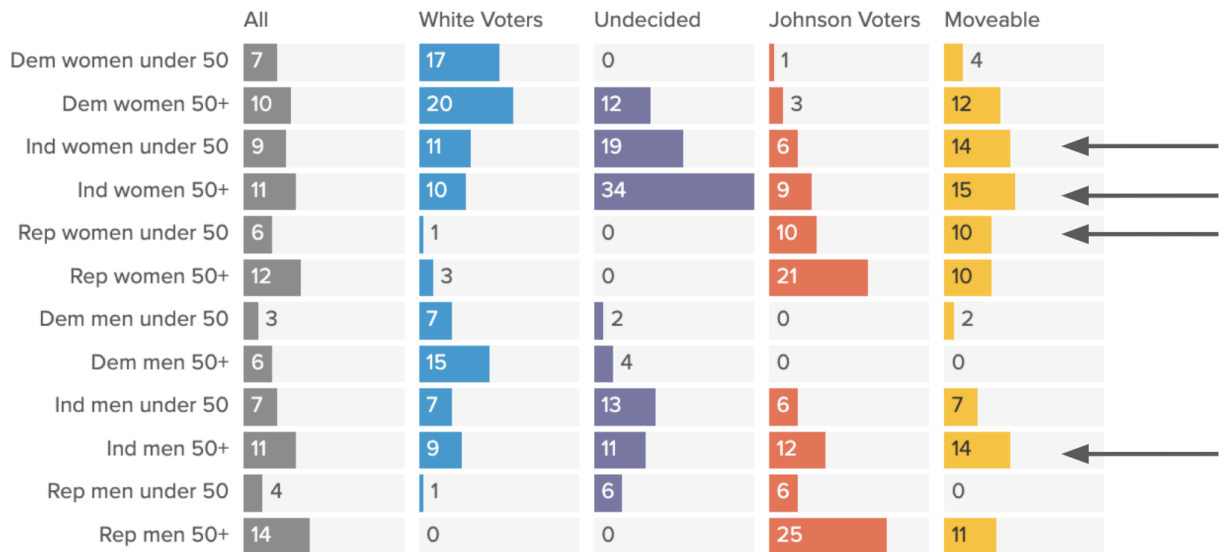
**Which TWO of the following statements are the best reasons to support Kelly White for Sheriff?**



**Who are the movable voters?**

The following groups are overrepresented among the movable voters relative to the likely electorate:

- Unaffiliated women
- Unaffiliated men ages 50+
- Republican women under 50



Prioritize these groups in your targeted communications with Alamance County voters.

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Kelly White faces strong headwinds against a well-known, well-liked 20-year incumbent, but there are opportunities to move the needle with certain voters by providing targeted information-based messages that speak to their concerns and values.

- Highlight Johnson's racist attitudes and behaviors, plus jail deaths. Where possible, highlight stories of how individuals (especially mothers and children) have been affected by Johnson's actions. Deemphasize the U.S. Department of Justice and federal investigations, and reframe these as "independent" investigations.
- Deprioritize information on protests.
- Establish White's length and breadth of experience, and his pledge to use independent investigations. Also consider highlighting White's commitment to addressing mental health outside the jail system.
- Target communications by prioritizing unaffiliated women, unaffiliated men ages 50+, and Republican women under 50.