

BATTLEGROUND BLUEPRINT

Winning Narratives on
Immigration and Safety
for 2024 Elections

ACLU



Reclaiming The Narrative

We offer a true community safety vision

- We are all aligned on wanting to see safe, thriving communities.
- The overreliance on police and incarceration makes us less safe – perpetuating cycles of violence and instability.
- True safety comes from accessible and affordable housing, comprehensive mental health and substance use disorder services, education, and opportunity.

Safety + Justice Messaging Research

- **Phase 1:** Identify the most effective messengers and messages.
- **Phase 2:** Validate our findings in critical political battlegrounds.

Research shows that our agenda is most compelling when presented as a direct solution to the safety issues people are witnessing in their communities, rather than solely a response to the harms caused by incarceration.

Messaging Experiment

Phase 1

Attribute Map

Oppositional messaging

Neutral messaging

| | Problem | Policy & Benefit | Scope | Messenger | Villain | Value |
|-----------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Level #1 | People don't feel safe | End over-reliance on police | Financial implications | Veteran | Tough on crime politicians | Second chances |
| Level #2 | Incarceration | Invest in proven solutions | Human implications | Health care provider | Right-wing extremists | We all deserve safety |
| Level #3 | Police | Reduce number of people in jail | Financial + human implications | Law enforcement | Authoritarians | Back the blue/ support the police |
| Level #4 | Criminalizing not working | Reduce sentences | US has high incarceration | Faith leader | Extremists | Protect our way of life |
| Level #5 | Violent crime wave | Eliminate mandatory minimums | Your neighborhood/ backyard | Crime victim | Drug dealers | Accountability |
| Level #6 | Fentanyl | Fund police | Fentanyl devastating communities | Parent | Criminals | Justice |
| Level #7 | Lawless liberal cities | Lock them up | Revolving door | Directly impacted person | Immigrants | Opportunity |

Example Message

On each screen, respondents saw side-by-side messages in the following format with each component randomly populating from the [Attribute Map](#). They were asked to identify which message came closest to their view.

As a **local sheriff**, I have a message to share about public safety.

We are a country that believes in **opportunity**, but **society is too quick to treat people like criminals instead of addressing the root causes of crime.**

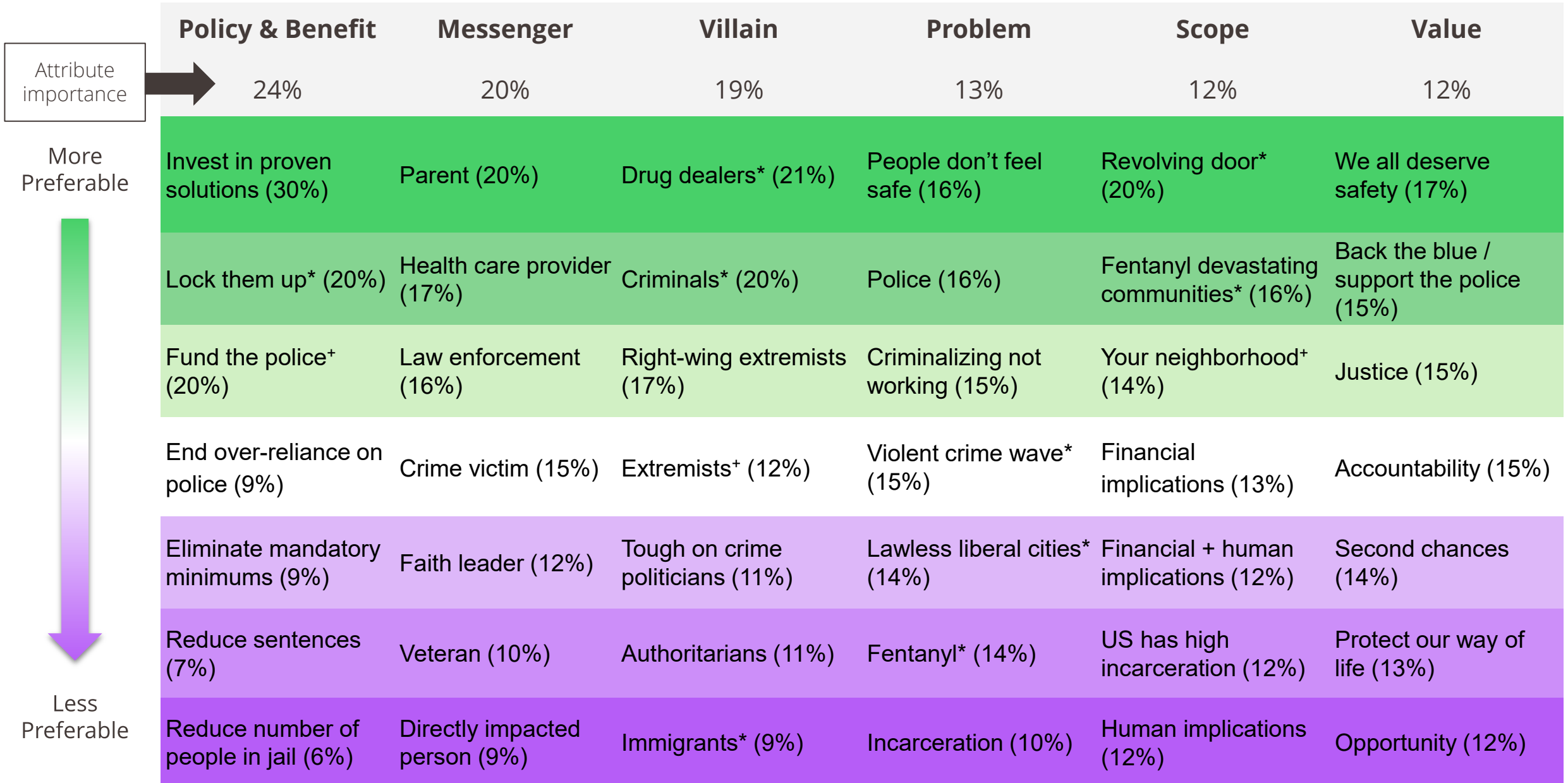
The criminal justice system tears apart families, destroys lives, and deprives people of opportunity.

We need **right-wing extremists** to get out of the way.

Let's safely end or shorten the sentences of people in prison who are determined not to pose a threat to public safety.

This would ensure we actually live up to our value of **opportunity**.

Overall Favorability by Attribute Level



Top Performing Message

As a healthcare provider, I have a message to share about public safety.

We are a country that believes that everyone deserves to be safe, but people don't feel safe in their own neighborhoods.

Dangerous and addictive drugs like Fentanyl are devastating families and communities, with overdose now the leading cause of accidental death in the US – even more than car accidents.

We need criminals to get out of the way.

We cannot arrest our way out of homelessness, drug use, or poverty. We need to invest in proven solutions that address the root causes of crime, like affordable housing, mental health and addiction services, and economic growth.

This would ensure we actually live up to our value of safety.

Battleground Blueprint: Winning Narratives on Public Safety Phase 2

Battleground research shows that it's good policy and good politics to champion a solutions-driven vision for public safety.

A solutions Democrat beats a tough Republican.

TOUGH REPUBLICAN

The Republican says: “Our country is in a state of chaos, crime is skyrocketing, and we’ve become a lawless society. Under my leadership, we will restore law and order. We’ll support our police like never before, crack down on crime, and put criminals where they belong – behind bars. We’re going to take back our streets and make America safe again. No more weak policies, only strong action to keep our citizens secure.”

SOLUTIONS DEMOCRAT

The Democrat says: “To make our communities safer, we need to stop crime before it happens. We need to ensure that people can afford housing and don’t wind up on the streets. And that people struggling with mental health and addiction have the help they need. We need to steer young people away from violence through intervention programs and employment opportunities. By preventing crime, our communities will be safer and police will have more time to focus on the most serious cases.”

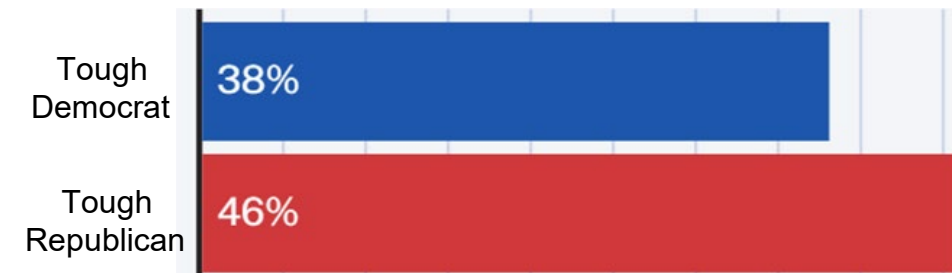
TOUGH DEMOCRAT

The Democrat says: “What’s happening in our beautiful towns and cities is alarming and unacceptable. I will restore a sense of safety that the hardworking people of this country deserve by putting more police on the streets and by stopping the revolving door of criminals in and out of our communities. We need to ensure that drug dealers and criminals who break the law are held accountable to the highest degree.”

Solutions Dem vs. Tough Rep



Tough Dem vs. Tough Rep



Source: YouGov Blue April 2024 nationwide survey.

A solutions Republican decisively defeats a tough Democrat.

TOUGH DEMOCRAT

The Democrat Says: "MAGA Republicans are pushing a soft-on-crime agenda to defund the police, pardon violent insurrectionists, and align with convicted criminals. Their extreme agenda seeks to undermine the Justice Department and abolish the FBI. I support increasing funding for our police departments, while Republicans propose massive cuts to crime-fighting agencies and side with violent January 6 insurrectionists over law enforcement."

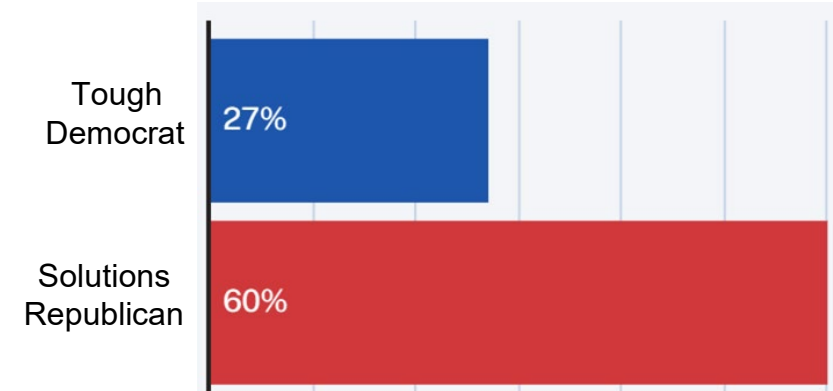
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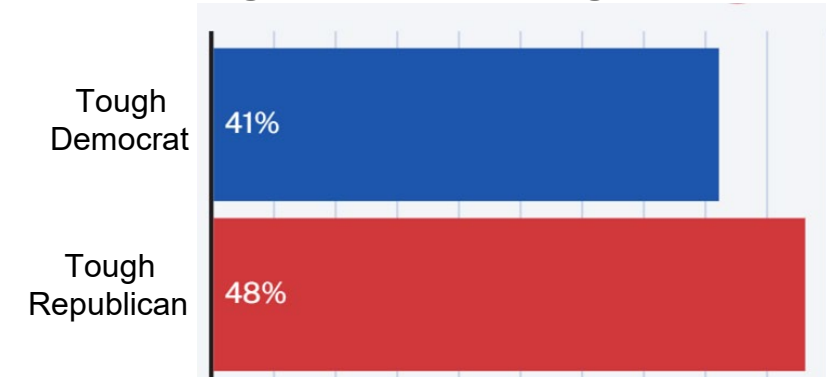
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Solutions Rep vs. Tough Dem



Tough Rep vs. Tough Dem



Source: YouGov Blue May 2024 nationwide survey.

Visit aclu.org/BattlegroundBlueprint to view the playbook + infographics.



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Battleground Blueprint

Winning Narratives on Immigration and Safety for 2024 Elections

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Immigration and public safety are two critical areas of concern for key base audiences, especially Black voters, and persuadable audiences, namely independents and undecided voters. Extremist candidates currently control the narrative in this terrain and are effectively weaponizing Americans' fears to win support. These extremist candidates paint a picture of communities under siege and insist the only way to keep families safe is to lock up more people in jails, prisons, and immigration detention centers, and label any candidate who disagrees with this punitive, harsh approach as "soft," "weak," and "unfit" to address the issues facing our communities. Their fear mongering is working – voters believe crime is increasing even though [data shows](#) it is decreasing in most jurisdictions.

Rather than offering an alternative and affirmative vision to address public safety concerns and a broken immigration system, some candidates respond to these attacks by either avoiding the conversation altogether or attempting to go toe-to-toe with their competition by showing they are just as "tough" on these issues. **The data shows that, regardless of political party affiliation, both are losing strategies.**

In 2023, the ACLU set out to better understand the values and attitudes that people hold about the immigration and justice systems, both of which are intensely politicized and polarizing. Partnering with Impact Research and Lake Research Partners, in March 2024 we surveyed voters in eight congressional battleground districts across five states: Arizona, California, New Jersey, New York, and Ohio. In April



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