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

and May, we then fielded YouGov surveys in battleground states — Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, and Pennsylvania—as well as nationally. Based on previous research, we were curious to see if we could identify a gap between what voters want — solutions — and what candidates assume they want — toughness. And we did.

Our goal was to develop messages for both political parties that advance civil liberties and civil rights when it comes to immigration and public safety. As a nonpartisan organization, the ACLU works with — and holds accountable — leaders in both political parties. Our research, coupled with numerous recent surveys conducted by well-respected firms — including Benenson Strategy Group, Global Strategy Group (GSG), and GQR — demonstrates that when candidates try to take a page out of the MAGA playbook to seem "tough" on crime and the border, they lose votes among key persuadable audiences. More so, this punitive vision for the country erodes trust among core constituencies, like Black and young voters, many of whom are already fatigued and unenthusiastic about their choices. If candidates fail to inspire and motivate these base voters, they could very well choose to sit this election out. Similarly, sidestepping these conversations altogether is not a winning strategy because it cedes the ground to extremist candidates, normalizes tools of authoritarian disinformation campaigns, and risks further alienating persuadable voters who are eager to hear real solutions on these issues — and whose votes could tip the scales in November.

But there is a path forward. **When candidates, regardless of political party, offer a fresh, affirmative vision for tackling the root causes of these issues, they position themselves most favorably with the overall electorate, and they are especially persuasive to swing voters in key battleground states and districts.** This playbook offers critical insights into what voters in battlegrounds think about immigration and public safety, as well as how candidates can win on both.

Sincerely,

Deirdre Schifeling

IMMIGRATION

What Voters Think about Immigration and the Border

Many American voters feel a deep tension when it comes to immigration. On the one hand, recent polling shows that immigration is a [top concern](#) for voters on both sides of the aisle. Yet an [overwhelming majority of Americans](#) (73.4 percent) also believe that we should not only provide access to the asylum system for people fleeing persecution and violence, but also a [road to citizenship](#) for long-term residents and Dreamers. Even if not the primary focus, candidates cannot afford to concede on the issue of immigration, which is top of mind for voters across the political spectrum. When they lean into the issue and provide an affirmative vision, they can close the trust gap with base and independent voters and, in turn, compete with their opponents.

With global migration and the displacement of people at levels never seen before in human history, voters are looking for candidates to **acknowledge the challenges** of managing increased migration of people to our southern border. But importantly, voters are also hungry for candidates who **champion real solutions**, not just extreme partisan politics or cruelty. A 2023 poll from [Fox News](#) found that nearly 73 percent of voters favor making it easier to immigrate legally to encourage more people to choose legal pathways to enter the country, and 66 percent favor allowing undocumented immigrants who have jobs in the United States to apply for legal status.

Voters don't want cruel, enforcement-only measures that betray core American values and put vulnerable people in danger. Proposals to ban asylum and separate families at the border are widely rejected by voters. A March 2024 [Immigration Hub](#)/GSG poll shows that 66 percent of voters in battleground states reject banning asylum, and 79 percent oppose reinstating family separation.

In the ACLU Impact Research survey of likely voters across six congressional battleground districts, 65 percent agreed that the country needs a balanced approach to immigration that both manages the border and provides a path to citizenship for long-term residents, while only 31 percent of voters agree that it is too dangerous to open up our country to immigrants and 29 percent agree that it is too costly.

Notably, our research showed that when candidates, *regardless of party affiliation,* adopt a balanced, solutions-focused approach that includes both managing the border and providing a road to citizenship for long-term residents, they outperform their opponents' current fear-based messages.

At the beginning of our survey with Impact Research, Republicans held a 17-point trust advantage over Democrats in these battleground districts. However, by offering an affirmative and balanced vision on immigration and the border — one that includes investments to fix our broken immigration system and treats people who are immigrants with dignity and respect — Democrats closed that trust gap by seven points. Additional ACLU YouGov polling of voters nationwide showed that *when Democrats lean into messaging that centers on this humane and balanced approach to immigration, they not only outperform a*

Democratic "tough-on-immigration" message, but they also can outperform the Republican "tough-on-border" message.
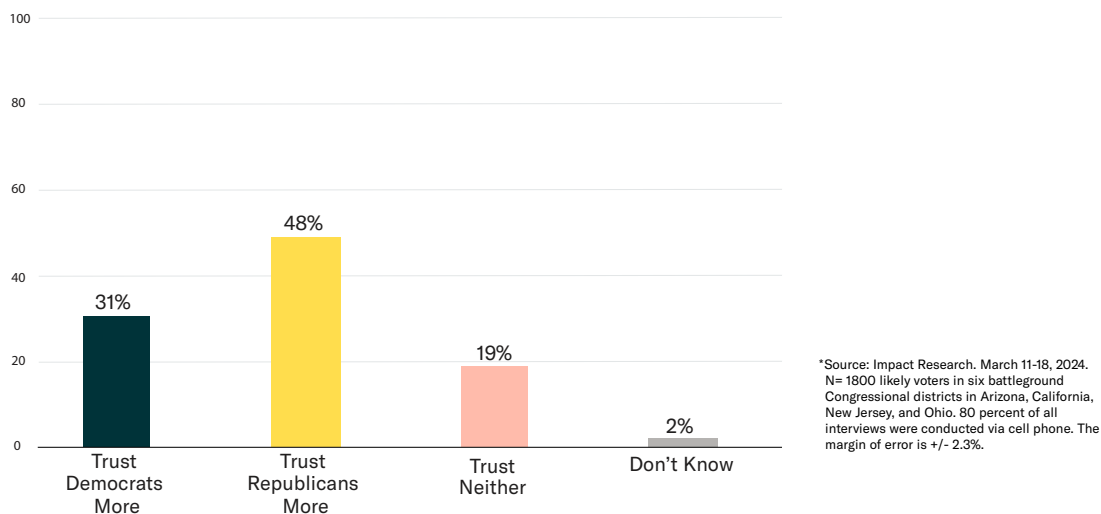
The same is true for Republican candidates. In a nationwide survey done with YouGov in May 2024, a fear-based Republican candidate message statistically tied a tough Democratic candidate message; *however, a balanced approach Republican candidate message beat a Democratic tough message by 16 points.*

It's clear that for candidates to consolidate base voters and win over persuadable and independent voters, they must focus on offering real solutions that meet the needs at the border—not fearmongering. The below provides evidence-based messaging recommendations that help counter the opposition's messaging on immigration and resonate with voters' core values and beliefs about immigrants.

A Winning Immigration Messaging Strategy for ALL Candidates

PROBLEM: Right now, certain candidates are losing the messaging battle on the issue of immigration and border policy. The current strategy of pursuing and promoting harsh Trump administration-era immigration policies to appear "tough-on-immigration" or "tough-on-the-border" isn't working to build trust among the electorate.

Democrats have a significant trust deficit when it comes to immigration.

*Source: Impact Research. March 11-18, 2024. N= 1800 likely voters in six battleground Congressional districts in Arizona, California, New Jersey, and Ohio. 80 percent of all interviews were conducted via cell phone. The margin of error is +/- 2.3%.

"Tough-on-immigration" policies are not only unpopular with the majority of Americans, but they are also a betrayal of our core values of treating asylum seekers with fairness and humanity. Above all, cruel policies are not effective solutions to the real challenges we face at the border. To retain base voters and win over persuadable voters, candidates need a new strategy that meets voters where they are by acknowledging the current challenges *and* providing an affirmative vision on the issue.
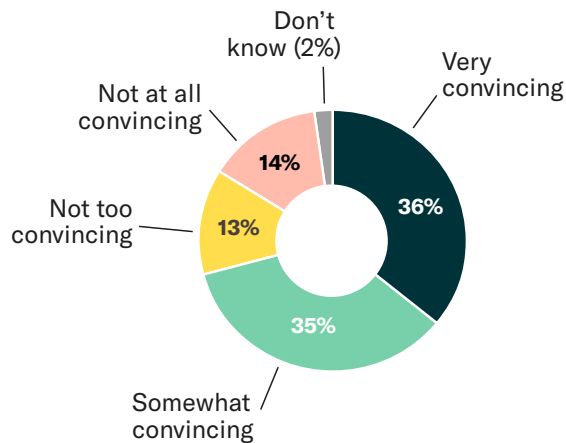
SOLUTION:

STEP 1: Acknowledge voters' concerns about immigration and the border, then pivot to solutions.
Candidates can earn support from base and persuadable voters by acknowledging the challenges of the moment: the increased migration of people to our southern border; the strain on local resources; and an immigration system that is outdated and broken, forcing people to wait years in limbo. However, rather than hyper-focusing on the problems at hand or doubling down on fearmongering, candidates should quickly turn to solutions. Voters agree that we don't have to sacrifice our nation's values to fix our broken immigration system.

71 percent of voters in six key battleground Congressional districts found the following message to be very or somewhat convincing:
The immigration system is broken. We have many people who want to become citizens and who already contribute to our economy and communities. We need to create a fair, orderly, and humane immigration system that manages the border and provides a path to citizenship for longtime residents.

*Source: Impact Research. March 11-18, 2024. N= 1800 likely voters in six battleground Congressional districts in Arizona, California, New Jersey, and Ohio. 80 percent of all interviews were conducted via cell phone. The margin of error is +/- 2.3%.

Don't know (2%)
Very convincing — 36%
Somewhat convincing — 35%
Not too convincing — 13%
Not at all convincing — 14%

STEP 2: Focus on a humane and balanced approach to help fix our broken immigration system, including improving border management and supporting Dreamers and other long-time residents.

- Nationwide, Democrat and independent voters are more likely to support a Democratic candidate who has a balanced approach to immigration over a Republican candidate who uses invasion rhetoric and supports building a border wall. However, when voters are presented with a Democratic candidate who uses "tough-on-immigration" messaging, the Democratic candidate loses to their opponent.
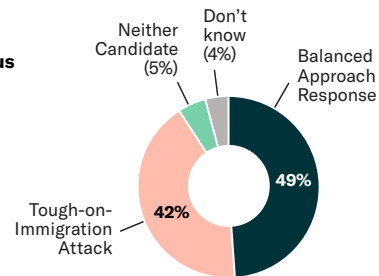
TOUGH-ON-IMMIGRATION ATTACK
The Republican candidate says: Immigrants are bringing crime and fentanyl to our communities. We need more funding to build the border wall and finally stop illegal immigrants from invading our country.

BALANCED APPROACH RESPONSE
The Democratic candidate says: We need a balanced approach to immigration that includes fair, orderly and humane solutions that address the challenges at the border and a roadmap to citizenship for long term residents and Dreamers. We have many people who want to become citizens and who already contribute to our economy and communities.
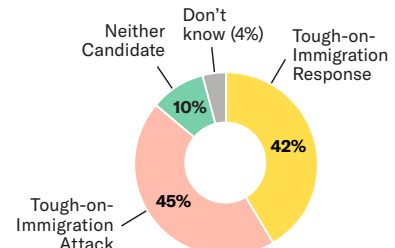
TOUGH-ON-IMMIGRATION RESPONSE
The Democratic candidate says: Democrats are ready to get tough on immigration and address the crisis at the border, but Republicans torpedoed a bipartisan bill in Congress. We need to pass policies that will bring order to our immigration system and allow our government to shut down the border.

*Source: YouGov Blue. April 10-15, 2024. n=1308 voters nationwide. All interviews were conducted on the internet and results were weighted to be representative of voters nationwide.

Tough-on-Immigration Attack versus Balanced Approach Response
Neither Candidate (5%)
Don't know (4%)
Balanced Approach Response — 49%
Tough-on-Immigration Attack — 42%

Tough-on-Immigration Attack vs. Tough-on-Immigration Response
Neither Candidate — 10%
Don't know (4%)
Tough-on-Immigration Response — 42%
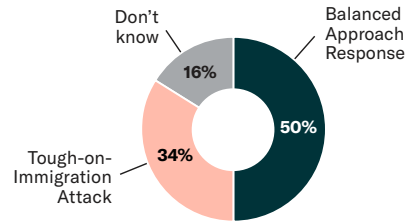Tough-on-Immigration Attack — 45%

- Similarly, nationwide voters are evenly split between a Democratic candidate who uses a "tough-on-immigration" message and a Republican candidate who uses a fear-based message. However, when voters are presented with a Republican candidate who uses a balanced approach message against the same Democratic "tough-on-immigration" message, the Republican candidate wins by **16 points.**

TOUGH-ON-IMMIGRATION ATTACK
The Democratic candidate says: Democrats are ready to get tough on immigration and address the crisis at the border, but Republicans torpedoed a bipartisan bill in Congress. We need to pass policies that will bring order to our immigration system and allow our government to shut down the border.
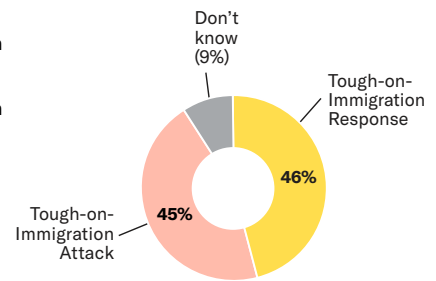
BALANCED APPROACH RESPONSE
The Republican candidate says:
We need a balanced approach to immigration that includes fair, orderly and humane solutions that address the challenges at the border and a roadmap to citizenship for long term residents and Dreamers. We have many people who want to become citizens and who already contribute to our economy and communities.

TOUGH-ON-IMMIGRATION RESPONSE
The Republican candidate says: Immigrants are bringing crime and fentanyl to our communities. We need more funding to build the border wall and finally stop illegal immigrants from invading our country.

* Source: YouGov Blue. May 15–20, 2024. n=1348 voters nationwide. All interviews were conducted on the internet and results were weighted to be representative of voters nationwide. Margin of error is +3.1%

Tough-on-Immigration Attack vs. Balanced Approach Response

- Don't know: 16%
- Balanced Approach Response: 50%
- Tough-on-Immigration Attack: 34%

Tough-on-Immigration Attack vs. Tough-on-Immigration Response

- Don't know (9%)
- Tough-on-Immigration Response: 46%
- Tough-on-Immigration Attack: 45%

- A majority of American voters (68 percent) in seven key battleground states strongly support balanced solutions that include both border management and protections for immigrants and Dreamers over an enforcement-only approach that focuses only on border management and limiting asylum.
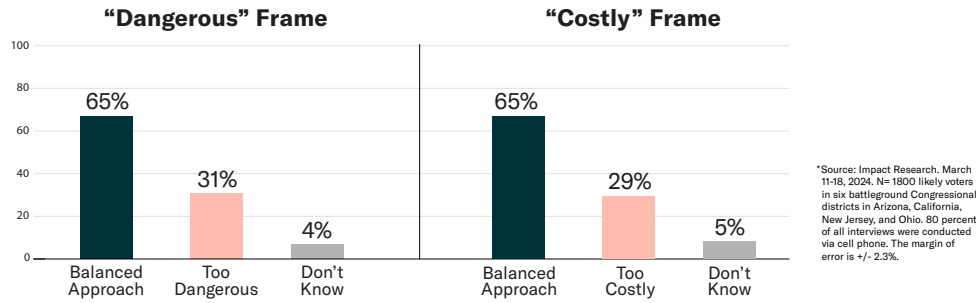
Which approach do you prefer?

	A balanced approach that includes both border security and protects Dreamers, providing them and other eligible immigrants a pathway to citizenship	An enforcement-only approach that exclusively focused on border security and limiting the use of asylum
Overall	68	32
Base Democrats	89	11
Swing	74	26
Base Republican	44	56

*Source: Immigration Hub & Voto Latino / Global Strategy Group. April 4-11, 2023. N= 1201 likely voters in 2024 presidential battleground states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin), with an additional 200 interviews conducted among Hispanic voters in those same states.
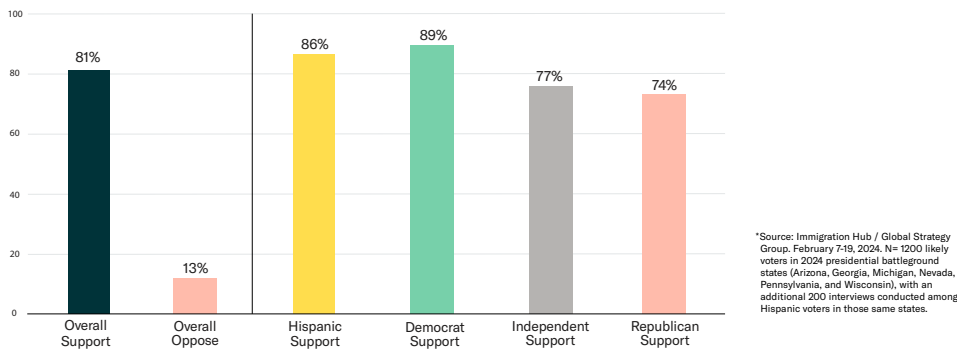
- 65 percent of voters in six key battleground congressional districts strongly agree that we need a balanced approach to immigration, even against arguments that it's too dangerous or costly to open up our country to people from other countries.

By more than a 2:1 margin (65 percent), voters in six key battleground Congressional districts agreed that the country needs a **balanced approach to immigration** that both manages the border and provides a path to citizenship for long term-residents, over the idea that it is too dangerous or too costly to open up our country to immigrants.

"Dangerous" Frame   "Costly" Frame

"Dangerous" Frame

- Balanced Approach: 65%
- Too Dangerous: 31%
- Don't Know: 4%

"Costly" Frame

- Balanced Approach: 65%
- Too Costly: 29%
- Don't Know: 5%

*Source: Impact Research. March 11-18, 2024. N= 1800 likely voters in six battleground Congressional districts in Arizona, California, New Jersey, and Ohio. 80 percent of all interviews were conducted via cell phone. The margin of error is +/- 2.3%.

- A majority of voters in six key battleground states also continue to strongly support creating legal pathways for Dreamers and longtime undocumented residents as part of an overall immigration solution.

81 percent of voters in six key battleground states support a pathway to citizenship for longtime residents who are undocumented and pass a background check.

- Overall Support: 81%
- Overall Oppose: 13%
- Hispanic Support: 86%
- Democrat Support: 89%
- Independent Support: 77%
- Republican Support: 74%

*Source: Immigration Hub / Global Strategy Group. February 7-19, 2024. N= 1200 likely voters in 2024 presidential battleground states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin), with an additional 200 interviews conducted among Hispanic voters in those same states.
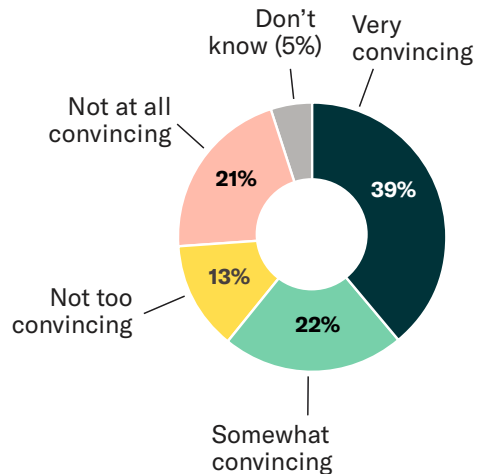
STEP 3: Highlight the contributions of immigrants to both our communities and our economy.

- A majority of voters in two key battleground congressional districts in New York acknowledge the critical role that immigrant workers have played in fueling our economic growth — and they think we need a more fair and orderly immigration system that manages the border and provides a path to citizenship for longtime residents who want to become citizens and already contribute to our communities.

61 percent of voters in two key battleground Congressional districts in New York agree with the following statement: *People who are immigrants work hard, pay taxes, build and own small businesses, and fill jobs in industries facing worker shortages. Hard-working Americans, including immigrant workers, have fueled the country's economic comeback. We need a balanced approach to immigration that addresses the challenges at the border and includes pathways to citizenship for Dreamers and other longtime residents.*

Don't know (5%)
Very convincing
Not at all convincing
21%
39%
13%
Not too convincing
22%
Somewhat convincing

PUBLIC SAFETY

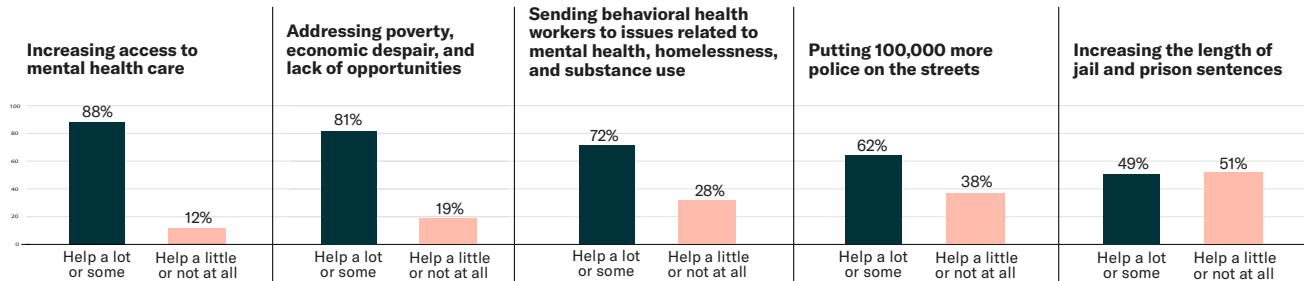## What Persuadable Voters Think about Public Safety

There is perhaps no issue in American life where politics and perceptions are more distorted than crime and public safety. What's the truth about crime trends over the past five years? There was a significant increase in violent crime coinciding with the start of the pandemic. Then, in 2023, crime plummeted, with the *New York Times* reporting "the number of murders in U.S. cities *fell by more than 12 percent* — which would be the biggest national decline on record," and criminologist Jeff Asher finding "2023 featured one of the lowest rates of violent crime in the United States in more than 50 years."

The current levels of fear and concern among the American public, however, belie those facts. Voters across the political spectrum continue to believe that crime is going up — and not just in big cities, but in their own neighborhoods and communities. With the anticipated tidal wave of electoral commentary and ads stoking fears about crime, what should candidates do?

Conventional political wisdom assumes that when voters are concerned about crime, politicians must lean into punishment and retribution to win votes, with calls for more police, jails, and prisons. This is not just bad policy, it's also bad politics — for both Democrats and Republicans.

Research nationally and in key battlegrounds consistently finds that when voters are asked which proposals will help most in improving safety in communities, they far prefer solutions to prevent crime, like increasing access to mental healthcare and addressing poverty, over punitive proposals, like putting 100,000 more police on the streets and increasing jail and prison sentences.

Which proposals will improve safety in communities?

Increasing access to mental health care		**Addressing poverty, economic despair, and lack of opportunities**		**Sending behavioral health workers to issues related to mental health, homelessness, and substance use**		**Putting 100,000 more police on the streets**		**Increasing the length of jail and prison sentences**	
88%	12%	81%	19%	72%	28%	62%	38%	49%	51%
Help a lot or some	Help a little or not at all	Help a lot or some	Help a little or not at all	Help a lot or some	Help a little or not at all	Help a lot or some	Help a little or not at all	Help a lot or some	Help a little or not at all

*Source: YouGov Blue. April 10-15, 2024. n=1308 voters nationwide. All interviews were conducted on the internet and results were weighted to be representative of voters nationwide.

By stoking fears about crime, candidates on both sides of the aisle expose themselves to potent attacks from their opponents. Research consistently finds that Democratic candidates start out with a significant deficit when it comes to whom voters trust to improve "crime and public safety" (-15 points nationally), while Republicans are at a considerable disadvantage on "poverty, addiction, and mental health issues" (-11 points nationally). **If candidates frame the public safety conversation around proven solutions to prevent crime, the disadvantage for both Republicans and Democrats narrows or disappears altogether.**
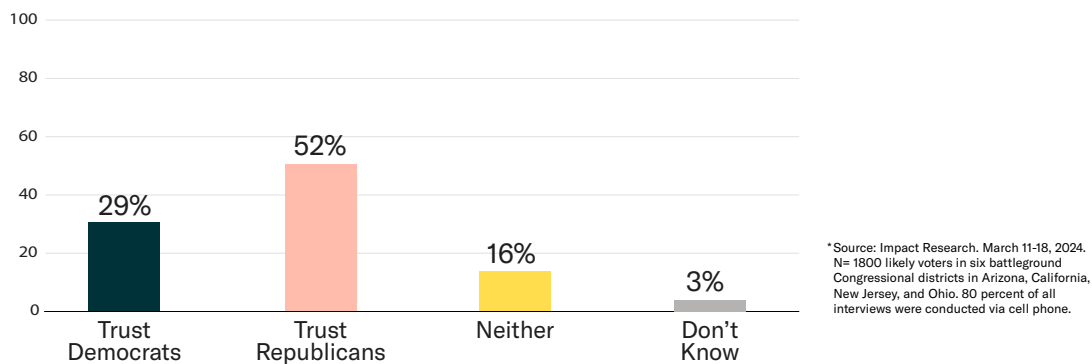
Notably, in head-to-head candidate matchups, candidates from both parties score higher when they lead with a message that is focused on prevention than they do with a punitive message. The Impact Research survey found that a Democrat trying to compete against a Republican "tough-on-crime" message with a halfway message about community policing and gun control is less effective than talking about addressing the root causes of crime. The "root causes" message performed better among key audiences, including those voters persuadable between the parties on crime (by an 11-point margin), independents (11-point margin), and Black voters (21-point margin). A national YouGov survey found that when faced with a "tough-on-crime" Democratic opponent, Republican candidates are most effective — to an astounding degree — when they offer proven solutions to prevent crime before it happens. In that scenario, the Republican wins by 33 points nationally (60% to 27%).

Regardless of political persuasion, it's clear that candidates are most effective at winning over swing voters when they offer a vision for public safety that focuses on solutions to prevent crime. *If they choose instead to adopt a punitive approach, their messages might appeal to certain constituencies, but they will not sway independent and undecided voters. What's worse, they will further alienate critical audiences, like Black and young voters,* who are turned off by "tough-on-crime" frames and are eager for their candidates to offer new solutions that don't trample on people's civil liberties and rights.
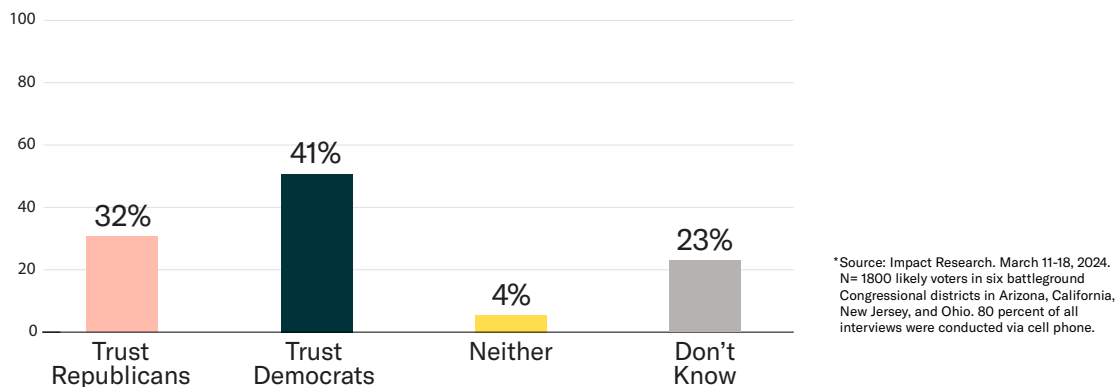
A Winning Public Safety Messaging Strategy

PROBLEM: Democratic candidates are underwater on the issue of public safety and Republican candidates are leaving votes on the table. Democratic candidates' current messaging strategy, predominantly focused on showing they are just as "tough" as their opponents on crime, or attempting to sidestep the issue entirely, is not working. To retain base voters and win over persuadable voters, they need a new strategy. On the Republican side, despite their initial advantage on the issue of crime and public safety, Republican candidates leave votes on the table when they offer tired "tough-on-crime" tropes rather than bipartisan solutions to fix our broken criminal justice system.

Only 29 percent of voters said they trust Democrats more on crime and public safety, while 52 percent said they trust Republicans more on that issue.

Bar chart:
- Trust Democrats: 29%
- Trust Republicans: 52%
- Neither: 16%
- Don't Know: 3%

*Source: Impact Research. March 11-18, 2024. N= 1800 likely voters in six battleground Congressional districts in Arizona, California, New Jersey, and Ohio. 80 percent of all interviews were conducted via cell phone.

Only 32 percent of voters said they trust Republicans more on addressing poverty, drug addiction, and mental health issues, while 41 percent said they trust Democrats more on that issue.
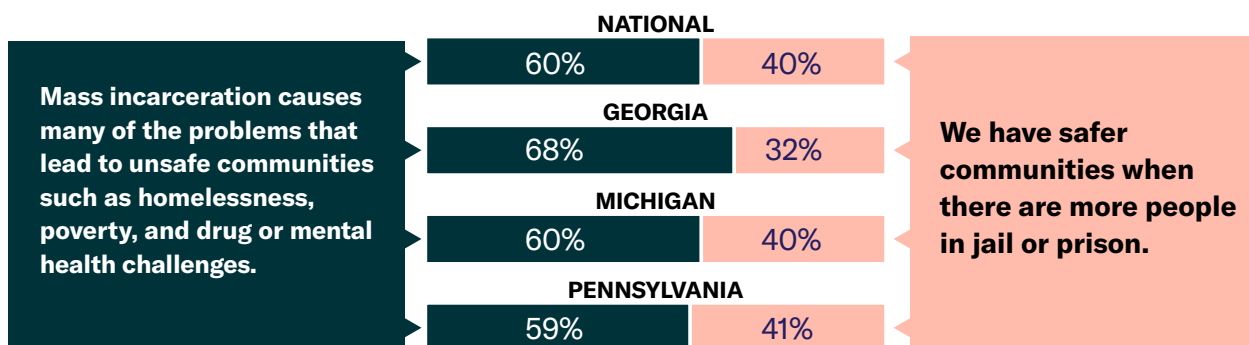

Bar chart:
- Trust Republicans: 32%
- Trust Democrats: 41%
- Neither: 4%
- Don't Know: 23%

*Source: Impact Research. March 11-18, 2024. N= 1800 likely voters in six battleground Congressional districts in Arizona, California, New Jersey, and Ohio. 80 percent of all interviews were conducted via cell phone.

SOLUTION:

STEP 1: Acknowledge voters' safety concerns. When you ask people about crime – both nationally and in their own communities – the perception is that it's increasing significantly. A Gallup poll released in November 2023 revealed that 77 percent of Americans think crime has escalated compared to the previous

year. Furthermore, 63 percent view the crime situation as a "very" or "extremely" serious problem, marking the highest level of concern recorded in the poll's history since 2000. Although these perceptions do not align with the actual crime statistics, <u>candidates should resist the urge to debate those perceptions and instead meet voters where they are — a place of worry and fear — and affirm the importance of feeling safe.</u> Most importantly, civil liberties aligned candidates should avoid intensifying fears; instead, they should foster trust by presenting a vision for public safety that is driven by solutions.

STEP 2: Don't defend the status quo. Voters across the political spectrum believe that the criminal justice system is broken and needs major overhaul, and that mass incarceration is ineffective and harmful. A 2024 FWD.us/Benenson Strategy Group poll found that 60 percent of likely voters nationally believe "mass incarceration causes many of the problems that lead to unsafe communities, such as homelessness, poverty, and drug or mental health challenges," including 68 percent in Georgia, 60 percent in Michigan, and 59 percent in Pennsylvania.

60% of voters believe mass incarceration leads to unsafe communities

Mass incarceration causes many of the problems that lead to unsafe communities such as homelessness, poverty, and drug or mental health challenges.			We have safer communities when there are more people in jail or prison.
	NATIONAL		
	60%	40%	
	GEORGIA		
	68%	32%	
	MICHIGAN		
	60%	40%	
	PENNSYLVANIA		
	59%	41%	

*Source: A FWD.us / Benenson Strategy Group online survey of n=1191 likely voters nationwide, including an oversample of n=273 Black voters fielded from February 13 to February 20, 2024.

Nearly two-thirds of voters believe it is important to reduce the jail and prison population in the U.S., including 63 percent of independents nationally, as well as 71 percent of likely voters in Georgia, 63 percent in Michigan, and 59 percent in Pennsylvania.

Overall, 67 percent of voters believe the criminal justice system needs either a complete overhaul or major reform, including 3 in 5 Republicans, and majorities in key battlegrounds: 68 percent in Georgia, 65 percent in Michigan, and 68 percent in Pennsylvania.

Additionally, nearly half of voters say that recent criminal justice reform efforts have not gone far enough, compared to only 20 percent who feel they have gone too far. This number is driven primarily by Democrats (64 percent not far enough) and Black voters (63 percent not far enough).
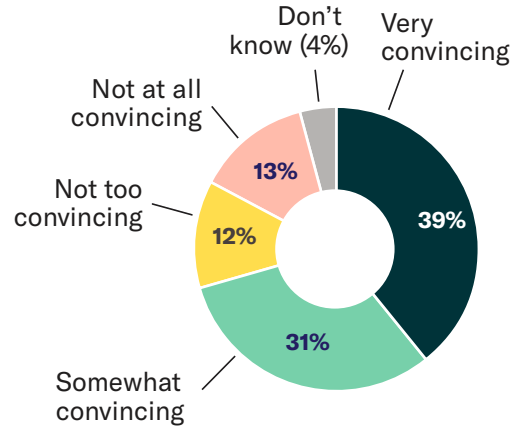
STEP 3: Offer evidence-based solutions that address the root causes of crime.

Messaging that highlights the need to invest in proven solutions that address the root causes of crime tests better than a "tough-on-crime" frame in key battleground congressional districts across Arizona, California, New Jersey, Ohio, and New York.

71% of voters in two NY battleground districts were somewhat or very convinced: *"We all deserve to be safe, but many people are understandably worried about crime and drugs like fentanyl. We need real solutions. The safest places often have more resources and support. To keep people safe, we need to focus on stopping crime before it happens. This includes making housing more affordable, helping people with mental health and addiction problems, providing good education, and creating jobs.*
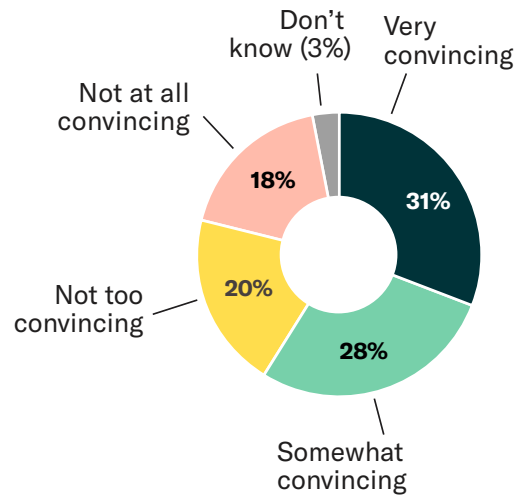
*Source: Lake Research Partners administered this survey via phone (cell and landline). March 14 – March 21, 2024. N = 300 likely voters in New York's 19th Congressional District and 300 likely voters in New York's 22nd Congressional District. The margin of error is +/-4.0%.

Don't know (4%) · Very convincing 39% · Somewhat convincing 31% · Not too convincing 12% · Not at all convincing 13%

59% of likely voters in six battleground congressional districts across AZ, CA, NJ, and OH were somewhat or very convinced: *"We cannot arrest our way out of homelessness, unemployment, and poverty. Investing in services that will treat the root causes of these problems, like **affordable housing and job training, is a more effective solution than relying on punishment and incarceration."***

*Source: Impact Research. March 11-18, 2024. N= 1800 likely voters in six battleground Congressional districts in Arizona, California, New Jersey, and Ohio. 80 percent of all interviews were conducted via cell phone. The margin of error is +/- 2.3%.

Don't know (3%) · Very convincing 31% · Somewhat convincing 28% · Not too convincing 20% · Not at all convincing 18%

A majority of base and persuadable voters in key battleground congressional districts across Arizona, California, New Jersey, Ohio, and New York favor hiring non-police first responders, like social workers and counselors, and moving away from an over-reliance on police to solve every problem.

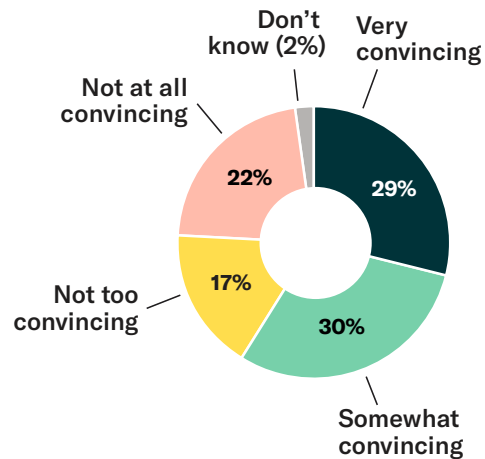**71% of voters in two battleground congressional districts in New York, were somewhat convinced or convinced:**

"We keep expecting police to solve every social problem, from kids skipping school to mental illness to homelessness to gun violence. It's common sense that police are not the answer to every problem. Instead of throwing money at things that haven't worked, we should focus on solutions that will work. We should fully fund things that are proven to create safe neighborhoods – like good jobs and schools. We should reduce the burden on police."
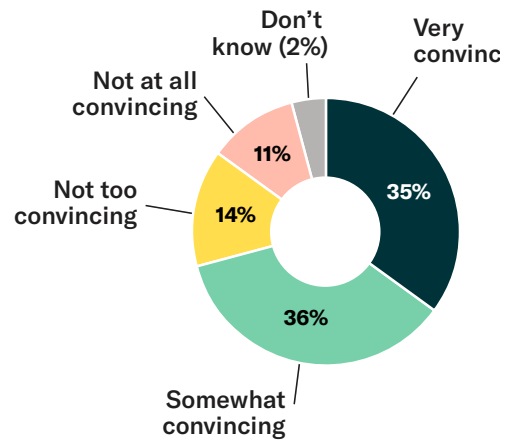
*Source: Lake Research Partners administered this survey via phone (cell and landline). March 14 – March 21, 2024. N = 300 likely voters in New York's 19th Congressional District and 300 likely voters in New York's 22nd Congressional District. The margin of error is +/-4.0%.

Donut chart:
- Very convincing: 35%
- Somewhat convincing: 36%
- Not too convincing: 14%
- Not at all convincing: 11%
- Don't know (2%)

59% of likely voters in key battleground congressional districts in AZ, CA, NJ, and OH were somewhat convinced or very convinced:

"Police are not the answer to every problem - they are not social workers or counselors. **We need to end our over-reliance on police to fix problems that shouldn't be their job** *to handle in the first place* **by funding more appropriate first responders** *for certain emergencies."*

*Source: Impact Research. March 11-18, 2024. N= 1800 likely voters in six battleground Congressional districts in Arizona, California, New Jersey, and Ohio. 80 percent of all interviews were conducted via cell phone. The margin of error is +/- 2.3%.

Donut chart:
- Very convincing: 29%
- Somewhat convincing: 30%
- Not too convincing: 17%
- Not at all convincing: 22%
- Don't know (2%)

PROOF: This approach puts all candidates, regardless of party, in the strongest position on the issues of crime, safety, and justice.

In two New York battleground congressional districts, both of which are currently held by Republicans, an informed trial heat tested two different frames on crime and public safety against a "tough-on-crime" incumbent. The survey found that the challenger offering proven solutions to prevent crime performed significantly better than a challenger promising toughness. Among all voters, the proven solutions message tested five points better. **Importantly, the proven solutions message performed significantly better among independents and undecided voters.** The proven solutions candidate won independents by

four points and undecideds by 19 points. In contrast, the "tough-on-crime" challenger lost independents by 17 points and won undecideds by six points.

A "solutions response" wins against a "tough-on-crime" attack with Independents and Undecideds

TOUGH-ON-CRIME ATTACK
The Republican candidate says: "We are under siege by a violent crime wave in lawless liberal cities from New York to San Francisco – and it is the Democrats' fault. I will restore law and order in New York by prioritizing hard-working, law-abiding citizens, and ending the revolving door that releases violent criminals onto our streets. I will ensure prosecutors enforce all the laws. I will support and resource police departments suffering from understaffing and low morale. And I will oppose Democrats promoting bail reform and defunding the police."

SOLUTIONS RESPONSE
The Democratic candidate says: "We all deserve to be safe. The safest places often have more resources and support. To keep people safe, I will focus on proven solutions to stop crime before it happens. This includes making housing more affordable, helping people with mental health and addiction problems, providing good education, and creating jobs. We can't solve homelessness, addiction, and poverty by arresting people. It's better to deal with the main reasons people have these problems. That way, police can focus on solving the most serious crimes."
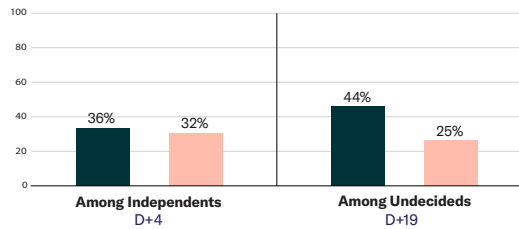
36% / 32%	44% / 25%
Among Independents D+4	**Among Undecideds** D+19

A "tough-on-crime" response loses against a "tough-on-crime" attack with Independents, and the margin of favor goes down for Undecideds

TOUGH-ON-CRIME ATTACK
The Republican candidate says: "We are under siege by a violent crime wave in lawless liberal cities from New York to San Francisco – and it is the Democrats' fault. I will restore law and order in New York by prioritizing hard-working, law-abiding citizens, and ending the revolving door that releases violent criminals onto our streets. I will ensure prosecutors enforce all the laws. I will support and resource police departments suffering from understaffing and low morale. And I will oppose Democrats promoting bail reform and defunding the police."

TOUGH-ON-CRIME RESPONSE
The Democratic candidate says: "I am committed to keeping communities safe and holding those who break the law accountable. I support giving police more funding so they can put more officers on the streets. I will give police and prosecutors tools to solve and prosecute homicides and violent crimes. I support strict penalties for drug dealers. I will stop the revolving door of criminals in and out of our communities and ensure repeat violent offenders and people committing crimes with guns don't get early release from prison."

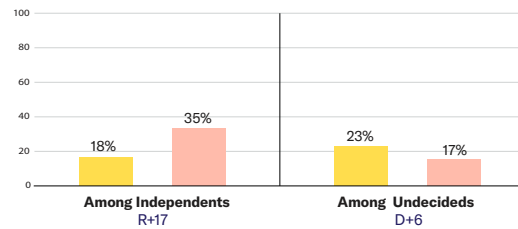|	
18% / 35%	23% / 17%
Among Independents R+17	**Among Undecideds** D+6

* Source: Lake Research Partners administered this survey via phone (cell and landline). March 14 – March 21, 2024. N = 300 likely voters in New York's 19th Congressional District and 300 likely voters in New York's 22nd Congressional District. The margin of error is +/-4.0%.

A national YouGov survey found that when Democratic candidates drive a tough message about violent January 6 insurrectionists and MAGA Republicans undermining the Justice Department, the **Republican is most effective when they counter with proven solutions** to address the root causes of crime — **outperforming their Democratic opponent by an astounding 33 points.**

TOUGH-ON-CRIME ATTACK
The Democratic candidate 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.

TOUGH-ON-CRIME RESPONSE
The Republican candidate 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 RESPONSE
The Republican candidate 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-on-Crime Attack vs. Tough-on-Crime Response

- 48% Tough-on-crime attack
- 41% Tough-on-crime response
- 11% Don't Know
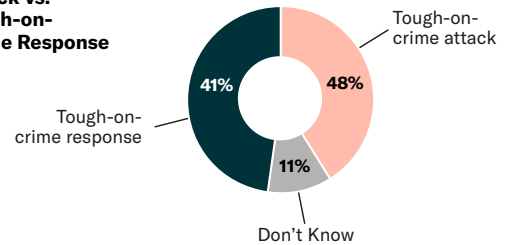
Tough-on-Crime Attack vs. Solutions Response
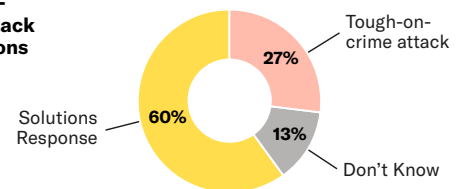
- 27% Tough-on-crime attack
- 60% Solutions Response
- 13% Don't Know

* Source: YouGov Blue. April 10-15, 2024. n=1308 voters nationwide. All interviews were conducted on the internet and results were weighted to be representative of voters nationwide.
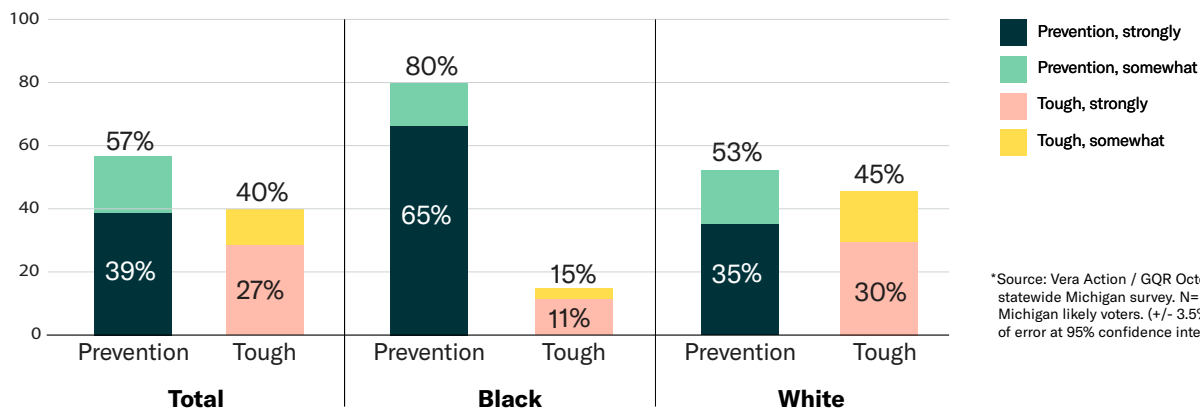
These results remain consistent in key battleground states. A Vera Action/GQR poll in Michigan and Pennsylvania found that voters want a comprehensive approach to public safety that prevents crime before it happens. A "serious about safety" message focusing on "fully fund things that are proven to create

safe communities and improve people's quality of life, like good schools, a living wage, and affordable housing, and do more to prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and getting illegal guns off the street," wins over a "tough-on-crime" **message in Michigan by 17 points among all voters, 57 percent to 40 percent,** including by 65 points among Black voters and 22 points among independent voters. **In Pennsylvania, "serious about safety" wins by 11 points among all voters (54 percent to 43 percent),** including by 13 points among independent voters.

Voters prefer community investments over tough-on-crime.

SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY: Fully fund things to create safe communities and improve people's quality of like, like good schools, a living wage, affordable housing and do more to prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and getting illegal guns off the street.

TOUGH-ON-CRIME: Doing more to get tough on crime, like having tougher sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep potentially dangerous people in jail, and providing police more support and resources.

Legend:
- Prevention, strongly (dark teal)
- Prevention, somewhat (green)
- Tough, strongly (pink)
- Tough, somewhat (yellow)

Total
- Prevention: 57% (39% strongly)
- Tough: 40% (27% strongly)

Black
- Prevention: 80% (65% strongly)
- Tough: 15% (11% strongly)

White
- Prevention: 53% (35% strongly)
- Tough: 45% (30% strongly)

*Source: Vera Action / GQR October 2023 statewide Michigan survey. N= 800 Michigan likely voters. (+/- 3.5% margin of error at 95% confidence interval)

CONCLUSION

This research delivers a clear message for candidates: Voters are hungry for bold, new solutions, not the same old fear-driven tactics. This clear message is true whether candidates are engaging Republican or Democratic voters. The key to success in 2024's electoral battlegrounds lies in presenting innovative, solutions-focused approaches to immigration and public safety. By embracing this strategy, candidates can sway the undecideds and motivate critical constituencies—like Black and young voters—charting a path to victory that aligns with civil liberties and truly resonates with the electorate's desire for meaningful change.

For a deeper dive into these research findings, contact Anu Joshi and Ellen Flenniken at ajoshi@aclu.org and eflenniken@aclu.org, respectively.

APPENDIX

Throughout this playbook, the use of the term "persuadable voters" refers to independent voters and voters who are undecided in their congressional district races.

Further information on the ACLU's polling and methodology can be found at
aclu.org/battlegroundblueprint