

April 23, 2025

To: Interested Parties

From: ACLU

Re: National Voters Support Crime Prevention Over Punishment

On behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), YouGov fielded a survey of 1,195 registered voters nationally in February 2025. This poll finds that nationally voters prefer solutions that address the root causes of crime and support moving away from over-policing and criminalizing communities—which they don't see as making communities safer. The following are key findings from the poll:

- **Voters are more concerned with economic issues than crime.** Voters are most concerned about inflation and the cost of living (30 percent), presidential abuse of power (21 percent), immigration (14 percent) and jobs and the economy (13 percent). *Only 5 percent of voters identified crime and public safety as the most important issue.*
- **Voters want safety solutions that address the root causes of crime by improving access to mental health care, addiction treatment, and other resources.** They believe that increasing access to mental healthcare and addiction treatment (85 percent), addressing poverty, economic despair, and lack of opportunities (79 percent), and sending mental health specialists instead of the police to respond to mental health and addiction crises (68 percent) would help improve safety in their communities more than a little.
- **Voters don't believe prisons make communities safe and that we should prioritize rehabilitation over incarceration.** 64 percent say that an over-reliance on prisons causes many of the problems that lead to unsafe communities and 66 percent say we should prioritize rehabilitation over incarceration to safely reduce the prison population. A strong majority of voters (63 percent) say that it is very or somewhat important to reduce the jail and prison population in the US.
- **Voters support changing how police enforce non-safety traffic violations.** Though most voters have not heard of laws to limit police enforcement on minor traffic violations, 57 percent say that they would support such a law in their state and 76 percent of voters say that the police should focus on serious violations, such as speeding and drunk driving, instead of minor violations.
- **Voters are concerned about funding cuts to essential programs.** 60 percent of voters are concerned that President Trump is going too far in slashing the federal government, eliminating important programs and critical services that many Americans rely on.

Safety Proposals:

Most voters support reducing the prison population:

- By nearly a two-to-one margin, 64% of voters—including 66% of independent voters—believe that an over-reliance on prisons causes unsafe communities. 66 percent say that we should promote rehabilitation over incarceration and safely reduce the prison population.
- 63 percent of voters say that it is very or somewhat important to reduce the jail and prison population in the US, especially liberal voters (84 percent), Black voters (81 percent), 30–44-year-old voters (78 percent), 18–29-year-old voters (73 percent), and independent voters (70 percent).

- 83 percent of voters strongly or somewhat support increasing the amount of time people can earn off their prison sentence for following prison rules and participating in rehabilitation programs.
- 80 percent of voters strongly or somewhat support making sure everyone is treated as innocent until proven guilty, not just people who can afford bail, by allowing people to await trial in their communities.

Most voters support addressing the root causes of crime:

- 85 percent of voters, including 92% of Democrats, 85% of independents, and 78% of Republicans, say that increasing access to mental healthcare and treatment for drug addiction would help improve safety in communities a lot or some (60 percent say it would help a lot).
- 79 percent of voters, including 90% of Democrats, 81% of independents, and 68% of Republicans, say that addressing poverty, economic despair, and lack of opportunities would help improve safety in communities a lot or some (56 percent say it would help a lot).
- 75 percent of voters say that the following statement is somewhat or very convincing: To keep people safe, we need to focus on solutions to prevent crime, drug addiction, and homelessness from happening in the first place. We need to invest in reaching people with the resources they need when they need it – instead of sending them to jail and giving them criminal records that make it harder to get a job, housing, or education.

Most voters believe homelessness should be addressed as a resource issue:

- By a three-to-one margin, 75 percent of voters say that lack of affordable housing causes homelessness, compared to 25 percent of voters who say that homelessness is caused by people being allowed to live on the street without facing criminal consequences.
- By a three-to-one margin, 77 percent of voters say that we need to address homelessness as a resource issue, focusing on improving access to affordable housing, mental health, and addiction services compared to 23 percent of voters who say that we need to address homelessness as a public safety issue, forcing homeless people to leave public spaces or face arrest.

Most voters support public safety solutions beyond police, including sending behavioral health specialists to certain emergency calls:

- 68 percent of voters say that sending mental health and addiction specialists, rather than the police, to calls related to mental health, homelessness, and substance use would help improve safety in communities a lot or some (43 percent say it would help a lot).
- 77 percent of voters, including 90% of Democrats, 82% of independents, and 63% of Republicans, strongly or somewhat support a program to have trained mental health professionals respond to these calls instead – so that police can focus on serious crimes and people in crisis get the appropriate help.
- 74 percent of voters say that the following statement is somewhat or very convincing: Police are not the answer to every problem - they are not social workers or counselors. We shouldn't ask them to fix problems that shouldn't be their job to handle in the first place. We can reduce the burden on police by funding more appropriate first responders for certain emergencies.
- 66 percent of voters, including 69% of independents, strongly or somewhat support ending stop-and-frisk policing.

Most voters support changing how police enforce traffic violations:

There is strong bipartisan support for changing how police enforce traffic violations. 70 percent of voters, including 81% of Democrats, 76% of independents and 59% of Republicans would support a proposal limiting or ending police enforcement of certain minor traffic violations, like broken headlamps, expired registrations, or air fresheners in their rear-view mirrors to prioritize serious, safety-related offenses and to reduce unnecessary police interactions with drivers. 76 percent of voters, including 84% of Democrats, 71% of independents, and 69% of Republicans, believe police should focus on serious traffic violations, like drunk driving or speeding, even if it means small infractions get missed.

- Voters found the following statements convincing:
 - (65 percent) Police often claim when they pull people over for minor infractions, they discover bigger issues – like drugs or a warrant out for a driver’s arrest. But evidence shows this is very rarely the case. Overall, stops for minor traffic violations are ineffective at making communities safer. It’s a better use of police time and resources to focus only on stops related to dangerous driving.
 - (65 percent) We live in a free country, where people shouldn’t have to worry about being pulled over and shaken down for money because they were a few days late to get their taillight fixed. That’s why it’s best to ensure police focus only on stopping drivers who are presenting a real threat to other drivers, as opposed to “policing for profit” through enforcement of minor equipment and administrative violations.
 - (64 percent) Right now, police are tasked with enforcing non-safety related traffic violations, like broken taillights or expired registrations. These stops take police attention away from more serious violations, like drunk driving and other crimes. Passing laws that eliminate non-safety traffic stops makes our communities safer by freeing up time for police to focus on dangerous driving. Police simply don’t have the time to enforce every traffic infraction.
 - (57%) Police routinely conduct stops that don’t enhance traffic safety. Data shows these stops disproportionately impact Black drivers and other people of color. We all deserve to go about our daily lives without unwelcome, humiliating, or dangerous stops by the police. To increase safety for motorists of color who are just trying to get from point A to B, we should pass a law barring police from enforcing non-safety traffic violations.

Most voters don’t believe deporting immigrants makes communities safe:

- 64 percent of voters say that the following statement is somewhat or very convincing: We all deserve to feel safe, but deporting our neighbors and tearing apart families doesn’t achieve that—it only makes private prison corporations and their CEOs richer. Politicians should prioritize real solutions to prevent crime and reduce violence. Let’s invest in what truly creates safe communities: quality schools, living wages, affordable housing, and increased access to mental health and addiction treatment.

Messaging findings:

When it comes to public safety, voters want investments in solutions that prevent crime by investing in reaching people with the resources they need – instead of sending them to jail and giving them criminal records that make it harder to get a job, housing, or education. **Regardless of party affiliation**, messaging that focuses on addressing crime through investments in proven solutions wins over tough-on-crime messaging.

- When a Democratic candidate uses solutions messaging and a Republican candidate uses tough-on-crime messaging: 54 percent of voters say they prefer the Democratic candidate while 46 percent of voters say they prefer the Republican candidate.
- When a Democratic candidate uses tough-on-crime messaging and a Republican candidate uses solutions messaging: 42 percent of voters say they prefer the Democratic candidate while 58 percent say they prefer the Republican candidate.

Methodology:

This survey is based on 1,195 interviews conducted by YouGov on the internet of registered voters. The sample was weighted according to age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and U.S. Census region based on voter registration lists, the U.S. Census American Community Survey, and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey, as well as 2020 Presidential Vote and approximate 2024 Presidential Vote based on available results. Respondents were selected from YouGov to be representative of registered voters. The margin of error (a 95% confidence interval) for a sample percentage p based upon the subsetting sample is approximately 3%.