



Immigration Messaging Guidance

American Civil Liberties Union, Inc.
National Political Advocacy Department

The ACLU Advantage

The ACLU occupies a unique position in the electoral landscape by grounding non-partisan political action in a century-long commitment to civil rights and civil liberties. Our unique value-add lies in our non-partisan rigor and our ability to run data-driven voter education and organizing programs centered on foundational civil rights that drive voter turnout. Backed by a permanent national network of 50+ affiliates and an engaged base of over 4 million members, activists, and supporters, the ACLU executes voter contact campaigns that reach millions of voters across competitive districts in each election cycle.

Through our custom voter modeling framework, the ACLU maps precise civil liberties persuasion universes nationwide, including a core target of 9.6 million middle-partisanship voters who are movable on defining civil rights issues. A recent randomized controlled experiment measuring the ACLU's mail program demonstrated a voter turnout increase among our target audience, significantly outperforming the national benchmark for comparable programs.

An electoral brand test confirmed the ACLU's strength: 70% of all voters know the ACLU, and the ACLU has a +15 favorability among all voters. We are uniquely positioned to communicate to voters of color (+16 net positive), women (+14 net positive), pro-choice moderates (+18 net positive), and younger voters (+15 net positive). We are a trusted messenger capable of moving critical segments of the electorate.

The Problem and Opportunity

The actions of the Trump administration over the past 15 months have pushed Americans too far. [52%](#) say that the Trump administration is doing too much to deport immigrants who are living in the country illegally, and [only 27% of adults](#) say the U.S. is a great place for immigrants. Meanwhile, [66% of Americans](#) say they have little or no confidence in ICE.

The approach of the second Trump administration to immigration enforcement has also had an impact on the nation's economy: "fewer workers, less consumer spending, and slower economic growth," according to [Brookings](#). And a [new study](#) found that "for every six fewer undocumented workers working in a local labor market, there is one fewer U.S.-born worker working in that labor market."

As Third Way found in an [April 2026 poll](#), this means that President Trump is underwater on his approval rating on one of his signature issues (44 percent): "A massive erosion from where he started on immigration. This is a dramatic collapse for Trump on his signature issue, with approval especially low among Independents at just 38%."

Proposed Solutions

Americans are ready for a common-sense approach to immigration that focuses on building a fair, functional immigration system with a path to citizenship.

Voters are looking for candidates who can acknowledge these problems and provide solutions. In an ACLU/GSG survey of Congressional battleground districts, 53% of voters¹ prefer a candidate who talks about the need to build a fair, functional immigration system with a pathway to citizenship over candidates who support the Trump administration's current approach.

We believe immigration policy must balance effective border management with human dignity. To achieve a system that both upholds the law and protects our communities, we propose the following reforms:

1. A path to citizenship for longtime residents;
2. Defanging our immigration enforcement agencies (ICE and Border Patrol);
3. Ensuring effective border management, rebuilding access to asylum, and expanding lawful pathways for people to come to the United States; and
4. Fixing regressive laws so that we can hold immigration agencies accountable to the courts and Congress - a failsafe for a future administration that uses an anti-immigrant agenda to threaten our democracy.

Safety, Legality, and Human Dignity

Right now, voters are more worried about extremism on immigration than the lack of a plan (+6)², creating an opportunity for pro-civil liberties candidates to own the "reasonable" high ground. But while they want a system that works better, they're not comfortable abandoning enforcement efforts if they think it will make them less safe. It's important to be explicit that keeping our cities safe and upholding the rule of law is also a priority.

Anti-immigrant hardliners no longer have the electoral upper hand. Candidates should be more open to playing offense on this issue amid continued public disapproval of the administration's approach to enforcement. A Democrat who offers a solution message on immigration always outperforms a Republican candidate. That said, there is little risk for a Republican candidate who embraces the solutions message, which performs just as well as the punitive one when pitted against a positive Democratic message.

Immigration	% Prefer
[Solutions DEM] A Democrat who says we need to stand up to the Trump Administration's cruel immigration policies while building a fair, functional immigration system with an earned pathway to citizenship.	54%
[Solutions REP] A Republican who says we need a reset on federal immigration policy. Immigrants are essential to our economy and the fabric of our local communities.	46%

¹ [GSG Interested Parties Memo on Immigration, April 2026](#)

² [GSG Interested Parties Memo on Immigration, April 2026](#)

[Punitive Rep] A Republican who says they support ICE and the Trump Administration’s efforts to deport illegal immigrants and keep dangerous criminals out of the country.	47%
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In addition, both Democrat and Republican candidates who embraced the solutions-oriented approach scored higher on key character attributes.

Voters were more likely to rate a Democrat with a solutions message as **authentic (+10 points), trustworthy (+4), principled (+4)** and **less willing to say whatever it takes to win (-14)** compared to a one who takes a “punitive” position.³

Similarly, a Republican candidate with a solutions message was more likely to be seen as **thoughtful (+18)** and **principled (+8)**, and less likely to be seen as **weak (-12)** or **willing say whatever it takes to win (-6)** compared to a “punitive” one.⁴

Message Recommendations

When it comes to immigration, our April 2026 ACLU/GSG survey of voters in battleground House districts showed that successful messaging should:

- Diagnose the problem that impacts everyone: *“Our immigration system is broken.”*
- Align on a common villain that doesn’t immediately force voters into partisan camps: *“Immigration hardliners in Washington are focused on extreme policies that create chaos but offer nothing to fix the broken system.”*
- And offer a remedy (a fair and functional system) without ignoring their safety concerns (support for border security gives us credibility): *“We need secure borders and a fair, functional immigration system. One that keeps our communities safe and upholds the law, while treating people with dignity and creates a pathway to citizenship for families who have lived, worked, and paid taxes here for years.”*
- A positive economic frame resonates with the base. To begin to shift the narrative here, elevate the contribution of immigrants rather than the threat of disruption: *“Immigrants play an essential role in America’s economy and communities...Reforming our immigration system helps strengthen our economy while keeping families together.”*

³ [GSG Interested Parties Memo on Immigration, April 2026](#)

⁴ [GSG Interested Parties Memo on Immigration, April 2026](#)