



Public Safety 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

Americans want leaders who will prevent violence, strengthen communities, and address the underlying conditions that make people less safe. In a Congressional battleground survey conducted in March by GSG on behalf of the ACLU, 56% of voters said they prefer a candidate who focuses on support and prevention programs over a candidate who calls for more police and time behind bars (44%). They also want accountability for those that harm others—including federal law enforcement officials.

While cutting funding for the services Americans want, the Trump administration is on track to spend more than a billion dollars sending unaccountable federal agents to communities across the country under the guise of combatting crime. [A majority](#) (62%) of Americans say this is making them less safe (PBS News/NPR/Marist Poll, February 2026).

Proposed Solutions

Our policy proposals focus on preventing crime, connecting people in crisis to support, addressing harm through sensible accountability that fosters real change, and ensuring that federal agents and law enforcement are not treated as above the law. A policy platform that focuses on the following will resonate with voters:

1. Support specialized crisis response teams that connect people experiencing mental health, addiction, and homelessness-related crises with trained professionals instead of escalating situations unnecessarily: *“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.”*¹
2. Support for services and programs that prevent and interrupt cycles of violence: *“True public safety means preventing crime before it happens. We should be creating community stability through investments in mental health services, addiction treatment, and programs that help communities thrive.”*²
3. Alternatives to mass incarceration that hold people accountable, repair harm, and reduce repeat offenses: *“We all deserve to feel safe in our communities. We need real solutions that prevent crime and hold people accountable when they harm others. This means taking full responsibility for their actions, including understanding the harm they’ve done, making amends to the degree possible, and becoming someone who will no longer hurt others.”*³
4. Ensuring law enforcement is held accountable when they harm others to prevent abuse of power and keep communities safe: *“No one should have to fear their own government. When federal officials overstep the law, there must be a way to hold them accountable because unchecked power is a threat to everyone’s freedom.”*⁴

Message Recommendations

Acknowledge that everyone deserves to feel safe and lean into proven solutions that focus on prevention.

Recent GSG/ACLU research shows candidates who focus on addressing the root causes of crime are viewed more positively and overperform candidates who favor a “tough on crime” approach. A majority of battleground voters prefer a candidate with a proactive safety vision over punitive rhetoric. (March 2026 GSG survey of voters in battleground House districts).

Crime & Public Safety	% Prefer
[Solutions DEM] A Democrat who says we all deserve to feel safe and the safest communities are the ones with the most support. Affordable housing, mental healthcare, addiction treatment, and good jobs prevent crime before it happens.	56%
[Punitive REP] A Republican who says our country is in a state of chaos, crime is skyrocketing, and we’ve become a lawless society. We need to support our police and put criminals where they belong behind bars.	44%
[Solutions Rep] A Republican who says we all deserve to feel safe and the safest communities are the ones with the most support. Affordable housing, mental healthcare, addiction treatment, and good jobs prevent crime before it happens.	49%

¹ [ACLU Battleground Blueprint, June 2024](#)

² [ACLU-GSG Interested Parties Memo, April 2026](#)

³ [ACLU-GSG Interested Parties Memo, April 2026](#)

⁴ [ACLU-YouGov Interested Parties Memo - Federal Law Enforcement Accountability, April 2026](#)

71% of battleground voters would be more likely (including 37% who would be **much more likely**) to vote for a candidate who says: *“True public safety means preventing crime before it happens. We should be creating community stability through investments in mental health services, addiction treatment, and programs that help communities thrive.”*⁵

Similarly, recent national research from YouGov/Vera Action shows when given a choice between being “tough on crime” or “serious about safety,” voters heavily favor preventing crime and breaking its cycle by **18 points**.⁶

Crime & Public Safety	% Prefer
[SERIOUS] We should fully fund things that are proven to create safe communities—like good schools, jobs, and affordable housing—and help prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and by getting illegal guns off the street.	59%
[TOUGH] We should do more to get tough on crime—like having tougher sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep dangerous people in jail, and providing police with more support and resources.	41%

Don’t try to “out tough” opponents.

Voters were more likely to rate Democratic candidates using ACLU’s suggested messages as **authentic (+10 points)**, **trustworthy (+4)**, **principled (+4)** and **less willing to say whatever it takes to win (-14)**.

Likewise, Republican candidates were seen as **more thoughtful (+18)** and **principled (+8)**, as well as **less willing to say whatever it takes to win (-6)** when they adopted ACLU framing.

Acknowledge a role for accountability for those who harm others.

Voters want to know that candidates will hold people accountable for their actions, but they want more than just punishment—they want leaders to pursue approaches that foster real change.

Similarly, Vera Action found in a national YouGov survey, that an accountability message focused on repair beat the one focused on strict punishment by **21 points**.⁷

Crime & Public Safety	% Prefer
[SERIOUS]: To make communities safe, people who break the law must be held accountable. This means accepting the consequences, seeing the harm they’ve done, and changing their behavior. Once someone is serving their sentence, we need to incentivize participation in programming that will help them grow, turn their lives around, and avoid future crime.	57%
[TOUGH]: We need to make sure that people who break the law are held accountable by enforcing strict punishment and deterring others from criminal behavior. If you do the crime, you should do the time by serving your full sentence. Offenders shouldn’t be able to get out of jail or prison early simply because they complete programs or have a good track record behind bars.	36%

⁵ [ACLU-GSG Interested Parties Memo, April 2026](#)

⁶ [National YouGov/Vera Action survey, Jan 2026](#)

⁷ [National YouGov/Vera Action survey, April 2026](#)

Calls for accountability must include law enforcement.

YouGov national research on behalf of the ACLU shows that voters across the ideological spectrum—including majorities from every party, ideology, and 2024 voting group—believe federal law enforcement must be subject to clear limits, see accountability as essential to public safety, and view unchecked government power as a threat to a free society.

To address voters’ concerns on the issue of law enforcement accountability, candidates should lead with government accountability as a universal value and championing its connection to public safety.

Accountability	Overall voters	Democrats	Republicans	Trump voters
No one should be above the law, including federal agents, and government officials who violate people's rights must be held accountable.	93% agree	98% agree	87% agree	89% agree
No one should have to fear their own government and unchecked power is a threat to everyone’s freedom	90% agree	97% agree	82% agree	84% agree

GSG polling supports these findings. When asked if battleground voters were more worried about leaders being too soft on crime or leaders gutting federal programs and backing federal law enforcement surges, voters were more worried about the latter by **4 points**.⁸

⁸ [ACLU-GSG Interested Parties Memo, April 2026](#)