

Californians & Criminal Justice Reform

The Opportunity Agenda and the ACLU of California engaged in a collaborative initiative to improve the way social justice practitioners, the media, and others talk about California’s justice system. The goal of this research was to explore the stories, issues, and frames that bring “persuadables” in, turn them off, and/or soften them for future criminal justice reform work in the state. It also aims to equip “reform evangelists” with smarter and stickier messages that could influence how the media reports criminal justice issues, how pop culture icons engage their audiences, and, ultimately, how policymakers legislate and how people vote on public policy solutions.

Messaging Recommendations

1. **Start messages with a broader vision of what the criminal justice system should do and what values it should uphold** - prevent harm, treat people fairly, uphold equal justice - then move into details.
2. **Leverage audiences’ interest in rehabilitation over punishment by naming specific solutions and alternatives.** Key audiences react favorably to the mention of drug treatment programs and mental health support specifically.
3. **More audiences believe that the system treats people unequally than believe it treats people unfairly.** Provide specific examples of how the system is unfair.
4. **Show the mechanisms that lead to unequal justice and highlight how they are unfair:** over-policing affects some communities more than others, implicit bias in the system harms people of color, and policies like the cash bail system link chances of freedom to money accessibility.
5. **Increase audiences’ understanding of the cash bail system.** It’s a policy that most audiences don’t have much awareness about, yet represents the unfairness of the criminal justice system that they want to fix.
6. **When addressing inequality, talk specifically about who is most effected, including African American and Latino men.** This information inspires the base toward action and does not decrease support from persuadable audiences.

Base (26% of adults surveyed)

Strongly believe that African Americans and Latinos face greater obstacles to economic success than Whites. More likely to report knowing someone who is formerly incarcerated and/or the victim of a violent crime.

More likely to express no religious affiliation, be Latinx and/or Black, and be a woman.

Persuadables (57% of adults surveyed)

Somewhat divided on their preference for rehabilitation vs. harsher punishment. Express a lack of familiarity with most roles within the criminal justice system, including prosecutors and public defenders.

More likely to identify as Independent, slightly more likely to be Asian American.

Opposition (17% of adults surveyed)

Believe that the criminal justice system generally treats people fairly. Greatly favor harsher punishment vs rehabilitation. Believe it is fine for police officers to stop/detain certain racial/ethnic groups.

More likely to be 50+ years old, White, and earn at least \$100K annually.

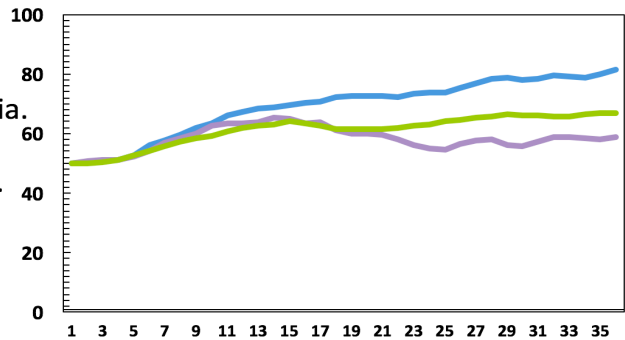
Methodology



- 8 Focus Groups:**
 Conducted in Feb. 2018
- North of Sacramento
 - Los Angeles
 - Inland Empire

Statewide Online Survey:

Total of **1,004** registered voters in California.
 Administered between June, 18th-22nd 2018.
 Margin or error: +-3.1



NORTH SACRAMENTO

SESSION 1 Mixed Race, Mixed Gender

LOS ANGELES

SESSION 2 White Women

SESSION 3 Latina Women

SESSION 4 African American, Mixed Gender

SESSION 5 Latino Men

SESSION 6 White Men

SESSION 7 Pan-Asian, Mixed Gender

INLAND EMPIRE

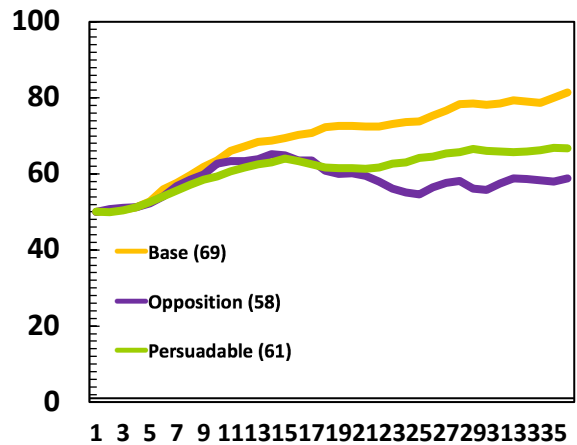
SESSION 8 Mixed Race, Mixed Gender

SESSION PROFILES

Top Messages

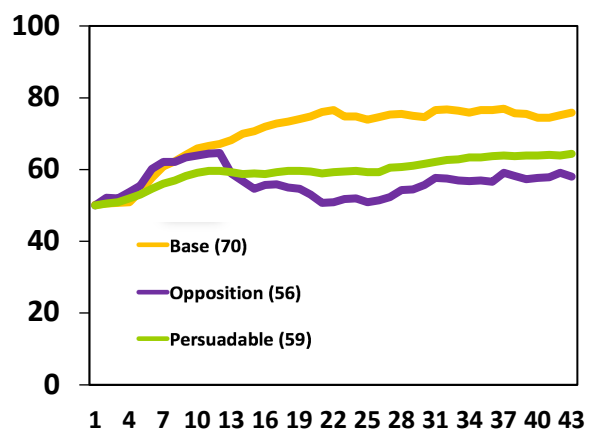
We Can Do Better

Our criminal justice system should reflect certain important values: hold people accountable, keep people safe, treat people fairly and with dignity, and prevent harm whenever possible. Our current bloated and outdated system is failing us. We are locking people up when research and experience shows us there are better approaches. We are spending far too much money on prisons while programs that we know prevent crime – like drug treatment, job training, and an effective public education system – languish. We can do better.



Equal Justice

Our justice system should keep all communities safe, prevent harm, and uphold the values of fairness and accountability. But too often, racial bias in policing and prosecution results in longer, harsher, and unnecessary incarceration of Latinx and Black Americans. We know from experience around the country that improved training and alternatives to incarceration, like drug treatment and mental health services, improve community safety and equal justice. We're calling on local prosecutors, police departments, and lawmakers to adopt those best practices.



Celebrity Influencer

Prosecutors and public defenders, judges and law enforcement, teachers and community leaders, artists and organizers all have to come together and start to do things differently in this country if we're serious about ending mass incarceration. We can't afford to keep running a system that takes broken people and then breaks them further. We can't tolerate a system that destroys so many lives and so many communities. People deserve a path to redemption that includes access to jobs, education, housing, credit, and all the components of a better life. They also deserve to fully participate in our democracy, including the right to vote.

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