



# Making Americans the Hero of the Story

## A Quick Guide to Greatness

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“America is strong because  
**AMERICANS ARE STRONG.**”

- President Joe Biden

# Americans as Heroes

Deep within the American psyche, the story of Americans as heroes rings true. America has always been about embracing the impossible and succeeding in spite of all odds.

When we watch American films and TV, whether it's Band of Brothers or Star Wars or the Avengers, this idea is ubiquitous - Americans face hardship, come together, and ultimately win the day.

However, turn on the TV, and the characters of the story are systems like "the economy," "inflation," "social media," or even worse, "politicians," leaving the everyday American entirely out of the picture.

Our most common political messaging echoes this pattern, with advertising featuring either the politician as the hero - "I did this," "Because of me, X happened" - or the enemy, "Evil Politician Y will screw you over," or "Bad Politician Z kicks puppies." And yet, this kind of messaging flies in the face of everything we know about psychology and how people actually think, feel, and behave.



# This is a Voter's World. (We just live in it)



Studies have shown that much of what happens in Washington, DC isn't directly correlated with what voters say they want and American voters desperately need and want a responsive government that listens to them, responds to them, and delivers for them.

From a policy perspective, this means shaping and passing legislation that helps American voters meaningfully in their daily lives – delivering practical answers to real life problems. And from a messaging perspective, it means making a conscious effort to center Americans and their stories. This centering runs up against the larger media and political ecosystem that centers everyone but everyday Americans. The kind of communication that resonates with voters gets specific and local with what's happening on the ground, amplifies constituent voices, and tells stories about how voters work hard, come together, and make things happen, in spite of any adversity.

**Ultimately, it means being both of and for the people.**



# Americans Want the Government to Be an Assistant to their Success

In the research we've conducted, we've found that Americans want a government that clears away barriers to productivity and invests in their success, without controlling them. With a deep belief in hard work and achieving things through that hard work (and being the heroes that they are), Americans want to feel like their success is their own, but want the government to open up doors to opportunity while helping them deal with the stuff that gets in the way.

In many ways, Americans feel like they are being put to death by a thousand papercuts (spam calls, surprise bills, etc.) that they can't do anything about. *THIS* is where the government is really, really needed. While there is a place for large-scale interventions, Americans don't want to feel like they are being controlled or managed by their government, but rather supported when needed. Ultimately, Americans want to be the heroes of their story - not the government.



# Americans Need to See Themselves in the Future

Our research suggests Americans see their country at a tipping point. They're afraid of a future where their jobs are taken over by robots, the earth's resources have been destroyed, where we've spent everything and trapped our children in debt or worse, and because of media (social and otherwise), tech, and polarization, we've lost connection with the wisdom of generations and each other. At the same time, Americans are hopeful for something better - a world where future generations are invested in, where there's enough for everyone, where people are free and have the opportunity to live life as they see fit, and ultimately, where we are connected with each other to do something bigger than ourselves and make the world a better place for our children and generations to come.

Americans need to be given a sense of their role into the future - first, that they have one, and second, that it's an important, heroic one. Americans not seeing (and being afraid of losing) their role in the future is holding them back from embracing a whole slate of Democratic priorities and falling back on conservative ideas that feel safe and familiar.

# Americans Don't Feel Acknowledged

Our research also suggests that Americans don't feel acknowledged or valued. Voters talk about how they work hard, care for their families and communities, pay their taxes, and do everything right, and yet, are only acknowledged when it comes time to get their vote. They don't believe legislation passed will benefit them and don't feel their concerns are heard.

Americans need to feel acknowledged and centered for what they do everyday - work hard, take care of their families, follow the rules, and make America the country that it is. In President Biden's words, "America is strong, because Americans are strong." Democrats would do well to follow the President's lead in acknowledging that America's greatness comes not from the top nor its economy, but from everyday Americans who get up every day and make it so.







# Americans Wonder If There's Enough For Them

In America everyone wants a piece of the pie. Voters who don't already have some want some for themselves, while those who do want to hold onto their own piece. This tension has become even greater recently as the American Dream is increasingly feeling further out of reach for voters, and with the increased cost of living, this feeling has compounded.

Democrats need to meaningfully acknowledge this tension that voters feel, talk in real terms about how we solve it together, and share a hopeful vision of the future with voters that includes everyone – where every person has enough.

By speaking to the unstoppable potential of Americans and the value that they hold, Democrats can remind voters that they're capable of solving every problem and that they can expand the pie.



“We must invest in America because Americans are worth it. When you invest in Americans,  
**OUR POTENTIAL IS LIMITLESS.”**

Swing State Future Majority  
Messaging Poll, December 2021

**85% of participants agree or strongly agree with this statement.**

**91%**

**of Democrats**  
Agree or strongly agree with this statement.

**82%**

**of Republicans**  
Agree or strongly agree with this statement.

**81%**

**of Independents**  
Agree or strongly agree with this statement.

# WHAT DEMOCRATS ARE CURRENTLY DOING

## 01 DEMS MAKE THEMSELVES THE HERO



Dems forget that nothing happens without voters' partnership. Dems talk only what they have done and leave voters out of the picture. Dems make themselves the heroes who save America instead of making it the voters.

## 02 DEMS DON'T ACKNOWLEDGE THE VOTER



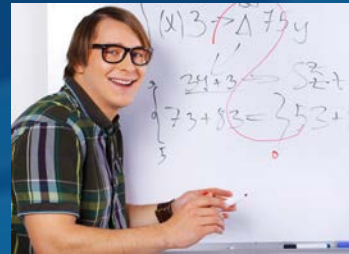
Dems focus so much on the special among us, they forget the average Joe. Dems call out our differences instead of our commonalities. Dems call out instead of calling in. Dems identify the problems in voters instead of seeing their potential and what they're doing right.

## 03 DEMS EMBRACE SCARCITY



Instead of all, Dems talk about some. Dems make zero sum arguments and induce scarcity by saying that some will have to have less in order for others to have more. Dems talk about spending instead of investment and talk about what they're running away from as opposed to the future they're creating.

## 04 DEMS ARE ABSTRACT & IMPERSONAL



Dems use statistics instead of stories. Dems embrace the abstract instead of where the rubber hits the road. Dems use language they like instead of the language voters use. If Dems tell stories at all, they tell stories that satisfy them instead of creating stories that satisfy everyone else.

# WHAT DEMOCRATS SHOULD BE DOING

01

## Every American is an Essential Hero

Every voter matters. Everyone was born at exactly the right time to take on whatever challenge we're facing and has an important role to play. Every American is an essential hero.

03

## Tell them a Story about an Abundant Future

Show them a better future ahead where there's enough for everyone, where everyone has a job that can't be outsourced, and where everyone matters.

02

## Acknowledge the Voter

What voters are doing, how they're making America great, centering and celebrating what they do through word and action.

04

## Wrap it in the Personal

Keep it focused on policies' personal impact, keep it local, keep it personal and keep it human, all through the telling of personal human stories.



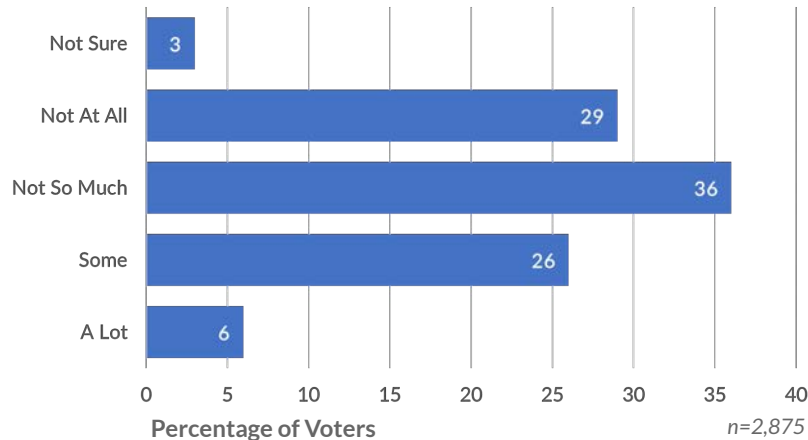
Take a look at  
recent polling  
from March  
2022 that  
affirms our  
findings...

Key Senate State Future  
Majority Poll  
FL, AZ, GA, WI, NV, NM



# AMERICANS WANT TO BE VALUED

In a Key Senate State Future Majority Poll, participants were asked:  
How much do you feel like you matter in America?



**65%** of participants answered not so much or not at all.

Democrat

**54%** of participants answered not so much or not at all.

Republican

**71%** of participants answered not so much or not at all.

Independent

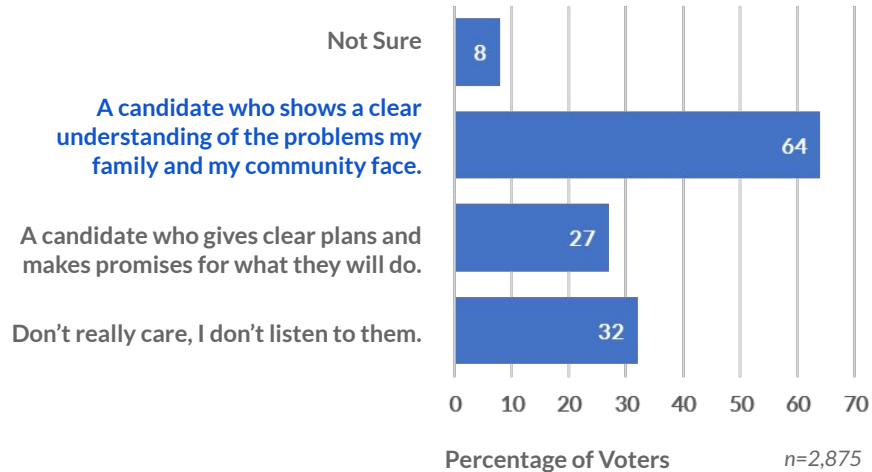
**73%** of participants answered not so much or not at all.

Key Senate State Future Majority Poll - FL, AZ, GA, WI, NV, NM, March 2022

# AMERICANS WANT TO BE UNDERSTOOD

In a Key Senate State Future Majority Poll, participants were asked:

What is more important to you when you think about which candidate to vote for?



**64%** of participants answered:

“A candidate who shows a clear understanding of the problems my family and my community face.”

**72%** of Democrat Participants

**62%** of Republican Participants

**58%** of Independent Participants

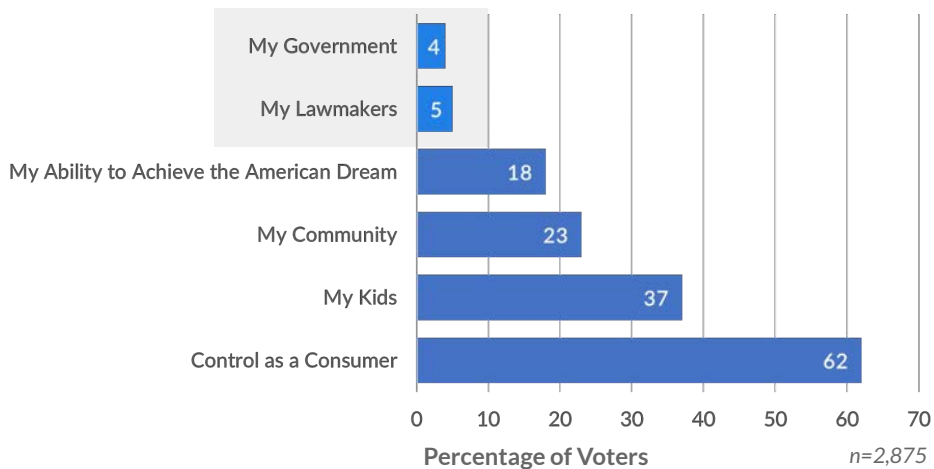
Key Senate State Future Majority Poll - FL, AZ, GA, WI, NV, NM, March 2022



# AMERICANS WANT TO HAVE A SAY

In a Key Senate State Future Majority Poll, participants were asked:

Where do you feel like you have control these days, if anywhere? Please select all that apply.



**9%** of participants answered “my lawmakers” or “my government”

**Democrat**

**16%** of participants answered “my lawmakers” or “my government”

**Republican**

**05%** of participants answered “my lawmakers” or “my government”

**Independent**

**06%** of participants answered “my lawmakers” or “my government”

Key Senate State Future Majority Poll - FL, AZ, GA, WI, NV, NM, March 2022

# AMERICANS WANT TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED

In a Key Senate State Future Majority Poll, participants were asked:

Thinking about your ideal President and the kind of President America needs right now, what kinds of qualities and attributes do they hold?

A Leader	85
Believes America can get better	75
Focused on helping America grow	75
Brings people together	75
Transparent	70
Focused on helping America be strong	69
Focused on helping America heal	67
<b>Focuses on taking care of citizens who are doing the right thing</b>	<b>66</b>
Strong	61
Believes America is great	60
Promotes diversity and inclusion	58
Focused on helping America be great	57

% of Votes

**66%** of participants answered:

**“Focuses on taking care of citizens who are doing the right thing.”**

**61%** of Democrat Participants

**74%** of Republican Participants

**63%** of Independent Participants

Key Senate State Future Majority Poll - FL, AZ, GA, WI, NV, NM, March 2022

# ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

Gretchen Barton is the founder of Worthy Strategy Group, LLC, and former Research Director at Future Majority. She is a deep-listening researcher and strategist who, with her team, has designed and led research initiatives in the political and policy space across America on poverty, the youth vote, Latino and AAPI voters, global nuclear weapons disarmament, immigration, gender in America, what Americans need in their next President, how Americans know what's true, what the Democratic and Republican party brands mean, and more.

She recently completed deep-dive studies of American swing-state voters across the nation and in Pennsylvania, Texas, Florida, Nevada, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Rural Wisconsin/Iowa/Minnesota, Virginia, and Missouri. She's worked on mayoral to congressional to presidential campaigns and is currently leading an initiative called What it Will Take, laying the narrative groundwork for the first female president, and advising on History Wars, a Johns Hopkins research initiative looking to unpack a way to bring Americans together around a shared future, if not a shared history. She is the co-author of "[The Science of Winning with Stories: Using Agency, Urgency, and Community](#)," a reflection on the most effective messaging to engage and move a populace, and is the author of this guide, Making Americans the Hero of the Story: A Quick Guide to Greatness.

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