

Housing Justice Narrative research initiative



PolicyLink



COMMUNITY
Power from the
ground up **CHANGE**

<https://housingnarrative.org/>



Housing Justice Narrative – Top Line Findings

- America is ready for a national conversation on housing
- 8 in 10 people polled gets that housing is a huge challenge for too many of us, and believe that housing is basic need for people to thrive.
- Most people see a role for government to address the housing crisis
- Our issue with activating the public is intensity of support
- Four keys to increasing intensity of support
 - Center race in messaging & narrative: People want to action to address existing inequities, and people need to see themselves in the story
 - Use tested, values based messages to break through the dominant “housing as commodity” frame, frame home holistically
 - Leading with lived experience moves people, perspectives
 - Engage base and persuadables in solution oriented campaigns



Defining Base, Opposition, and Persuadables

Throughout the report we refer to targets as **base**, **opposition**, and **persuadables**. They were created using responses to questions around worldviews toward race, wealth, and the role of government as well as responses to the value statements *government should ensure everyone has access to housing and government should ensure everyone has a place to live*.

Base – 22% of adults

- Believe that wealthy Americans achieved success because they were given more opportunities than others, that people of color face greater barriers to economic success than white people, and that government should create opportunities for advancement.
- Agree with the statements that government should ensure everyone has access to housing and government should ensure everyone has a place to live.
- More likely to be under the age of 30, Democratic, and disproportionately African American and Latinx.

Opposition – 17% of adults

- Think wealthy Americans achieved success on their own, people of color who cannot get ahead are responsible for their own condition, and that the government should get out of the way.
- Disagree with the statements that government should ensure everyone has access to housing and government should ensure everyone has a place to live.
- More likely to be white, male, over age 50, and Republican.

Persuadable – 61% of adults

- Have views that at times reflect total adults and at times reflect the opposition (e.g. both opposition and persuadables respond stronger to statements that lead with jobs rather than housing and to passing policies rather than electing new leaders).
- Partisan identification, age, gender, and racial composition more closely reflect demographics of adults, though they lean younger (under age 50) and are more likely to be in households <200% FPL.

Demographics	Total	Base	Opp.	Pers.
Men	49	46	53	48
Women	51	53	47	51
Under 30	22	30	10	22
30-39	17	16	9	19
40-49	16	15	12	17
50-64	25	21	33	24
Over 65	20	17	35	17
White	64	53	83	63
AA	12	18	4	12
Latinx	16	21	8	16
AAPI	6	8	4	6
Native Amer.	2	2	2	2
Democrat	43	71	14	41
Indep/DK	15	11	15	17
Republican	37	16	69	37
<200% FPL	29	28	23	31

Top values based messages



- *All children deserve a roof over their head and a safe place to live* – 75% strongly agree, 93% agree
- *Like air to breathe and food to eat, safe shelter is a basic human need* – 65% strongly agree, 92% agree
- *Without a job, you are likely to struggle holding down housing* – 64% strongly agree, 90% agree
- *Being denied where to live because of race, family status, or disability is discrimination* – 62% strongly agree, 84% agree
- *Everyone should have a safe, stable place to call home* – 62% strongly agree, 84% agree

Top values based messages



Though there is overlap among the base and persuadables in response to the value statements, the two cohorts differ in important ways.

- Persuadables are more children-oriented than our base.
- While the base wants to “come together as a community to elect new leaders,” persuadables want to “pass policies.”
- While the base wants “everyone to be able to live in a neighborhood with good schools, grocery stores, parks and libraries,” persuadables think “everyone deserves the right to a safe, secure, and affordable place to live.”
- Most important, while the base leads with housing, persuadables lead with jobs

Messaging Recommendations

Establish Shared Value

Establish a shared value and positive goal or aspiration before moving on to naming the problem.

Strong language: *“No matter where we’re from or where we live, having a safe, stable place to come home to is the foundation for our wellbeing and mental health” “We all need a place to call home and rest after a hard day of work” “Imagine an America where all of us can live in vibrant, thriving communities with access to health care, quality schools, and the freedom to make our own best lives for ourselves and our families”*

Name the Villain and Tactics

It is important to highlight the tactics they employ in addition to naming the villain / opposition.

Strong language: *“major developers, Wall Street investors, corporate landlords, and the lawmakers who give their greed free rein” “certain politicians and the richest corporations and real-estate developers who back them” “politicians set housing regulations and policies that make it harder for people struggling to make ends meet to find and afford a safe place of their own” “because of unfair rules, too many of us are left merely surviving”*

Work Together

Create a unity of purpose by describing people working together and using communal language.

Strong language: *“joining together” “working together we can...” “Together we can ensure”*

Evoke Universality

Talk about race and class, but underscore and “every [person]” when articulating an agenda to make life better for all.

Strong language: *“All children” “Everyone, regardless of how much money we have or what zip code we live in” “every child, every elder, and every person with a disability”*

Provide a Call to Action

Provide a positive call to action around unity in advocating for / investing in a housing solution the public supports.

Strong Language: *“come together as a community” “We can make a difference by coming together as a community” “We need to join together to rewrite the rules”*

Language Do's and Don'ts

Say...	Instead of...	Notes
It is a housing crisis	Referring to an affordable housing crisis	The affordability frame often supports thinking of housing as a commodity so we caution using that language, especially because we don't need to say "affordable" to increase support for housing – it is baked in already.
"basic human need" and "fundamental necessity"	"public good" or "common good"	Avoid treating housing as a commodity. Base and persuadable adults agree more strongly with the statements that say housing is a basic human need or fundamental necessity.
"[all children] deserve"	"we should guarantee [all children]"	As we have seen in other research, value statements rooted in children are very strong. When it comes to housing, "deserve" is stronger than "guarantee" (which people don't think is possible) across cohorts. In the housing arena people are very sensitive to absolutes.
"Everyone should be able to choose where to live when you can afford it. Being denied where to live because of race, family status, or disability is discrimination"		When calling out discrimination, a larger percentage of the base strongly agrees when the statement is prefaced with a call for all to be able to choose where to live when they can afford it.
"everyone should have this regardless of how much money" and talk about increasing the minimum wage and investing in stable, good-paying jobs	Saying "...no exceptions" or talking about speculative investors and house flippers	Highlighting how everyone should have this regardless of how much money we have is slightly stronger than simply saying "no exceptions." Though in other research the phrase "no exceptions" tested strongest among Millennials, when it comes to housing, adults across age cohorts tend to respond stronger to the class frame.

Language Do's and Don'ts

Say...	Instead of...	Notes
“Without a job, you are likely to struggle holding down housing”	“Without housing, you are likely to struggle holding down a job”	Leading with the lack of jobs is stronger than leading with the lack of housing for persuadable and opposition adults. Our base is more likely to strongly agree when we lead with the lack of housing.
“passing laws” or talk about “rules”	creating housing trusts or “policies”	“Rules” increases intensity in agreement among our base and “policies” increases intensity in agreement among advocates. Persuadables agree similarly to both statements.
“elect new leaders”	“pass policies”	Base and Independent adults agree more strongly that we need to elect new leaders that can increase affordable housing for all. Persuadables agree more strongly with passing policies.
“Government should ensure everyone has access to housing”	“Government should ensure that everyone has a place to live”	A solid majority of our base and persuadable adults see a role for government, but our base is more likely to strongly agree that “government should ensure everyone has access to housing.”
“Repurpose available spaces that stand empty”	“Dedicate public lands”	In addition to adults overall, both base and persuadables strongly favor housing policies that call for the repurposing of available spaces over dedicating public lands for the construction of more affordable housing.
pass rent control measures	regulating rent increases	In addition to adults overall, both base and persuadables strongly favor passing rent control measures at higher levels than they support regulating rent increases.
“joining together”	“coming together”	People are skeptical of coming together and respond more to “joining together” which is also more of a call to action.