



# THE FIGHTER AMERICANS WANT



THIRD WAY



WORTHY  
STRATEGY  
GROUP

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We uncover the why behind the what—so you can spark change where it matters most.



WORTHY  
STRATEGY  
GROUP

# BACKGROUND

In America today, strength is the currency of trust and leadership. Recent leadership studies and election reviews confirm that Americans crave strong, effective leaders—and a strong, effective America.

Democrats have long positioned themselves as "fighters" for the people. But with Democrats demonstrably out of power, critical questions emerged: What does a fighter actually look like, or sound like? And how does one swing back when they're not even in the ring?

This study investigated how voters define strength and effectiveness, and what they want to see when it comes to fighting in today's political reality. We uncovered different leadership archetypes and delivery styles to understand what kind of "fighter" voters are craving, what impact that kind of fight has, and how voters recognize the fighter who represents them. Our ultimate goal is to help current and upcoming Democratic leaders channel a version of strength, effectiveness, and fight that resonates as authentic, compelling, and distinctly Democratic for the upcoming midterms and beyond.



## THE RESEARCH APPROACH

For this study, we used a metaphor elicitation technique designed around how people actually think, leveraging best practices from psychology and neuroscience.

**How it works:** Before their 90-minute in-depth interview, participants spent several hours gathering images that resonated with them. Then our trained interviewers sat down with them for what feels more like a therapy session than traditional research. No surveys, no leading questions, no boxes to check. Just real conversation about what people actually think and believe. Afterwards, we analyze not just what they said, but the images they chose and the metaphors they used to find the patterns that emerged when people felt safe enough to tell the truth.

**Why this matters:** When you ask people to express themselves through imagery and metaphor instead of just answering questions directly, you bypass all the usual filters. You get past the socially acceptable answers, the partisan talking points, the things people think they're supposed to say. What you get instead is the raw, unvarnished truth—what people truly think and feel when nobody's judging them for it.

# THE PARTICIPANTS

We worked with a socio demographically diverse sample of **n=36 registered voters** across the seven swing states: Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Their political affiliation ranged from Moderately Conservative to Very Liberal, and they spanned four generations: Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z.

## POLITICAL AFFILIATION

<b>Moderately Conservative</b>	<b>n=6</b>
<b>Moderate</b>	<b>n=11</b>
<b>Moderately Liberal</b>	<b>n=11</b>
<b>Very Liberal</b>	<b>n=8</b>

## AGE

<b>Baby Boomers (61-79)</b>	<b>n=8</b>
<b>Gen X (45-60)</b>	<b>n=9</b>
<b>Millennials (29-44)</b>	<b>n=8</b>
<b>Gen Z (18-28)</b>	<b>n=11</b>

*All imagery that follows, unless otherwise indicated, was provided by the research subjects.*

# SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

## Living Inside Anticipatory Dread

Americans feel trapped in a slow-motion disaster—aware the ship is sinking, betrayed by both parties, powerless to stop it. They see chaos, corruption, and decay everywhere, and leaders who perform instead of protect. Beneath the anger is grief and exhaustion. People want to believe again that someone is in control—and fighting for them.

## What "Fight" Really Means Now

Despite living in fear, Americans overwhelmingly reject destructive strength. They don't want warriors or wreckers—they want protectors, builders, and unifiers. The fighter they crave fights FOR people (fueled by love) not AGAINST enemies (fueled by rage). Love is renewable fuel that sustains the long fight; anger burns out quickly. Real strength blends courage with humility, passion with calm, fierceness with care.

## The Goldilocks Paradox: Integrated Leadership

Americans reject both extremes—leaders who are "too much" (bullies, dictators, chaos agents) AND "too little" (victims, conformists, the paralyzed). They want integrated leaders who embody paradoxical qualities simultaneously: strong without cruelty, confident without arrogance, persistent without rigidity. Both extremes represent failures of love. Authenticity cannot be faked—integrated wholeness must be genuine.

## What Democrats Must Reclaim

Voters see Republicans as cruelly strong and Democrats as weak and ineffectual. They're asking Democrats to embody integrated strength: moral courage used in service (not domination), calm authority under pressure, strategic capability that delivers results, sustained persistence across decades, and speed with tangible wins.

**They want leaders who fight fiercely and unapologetically, stay united, use every tool, deliver real consequences, and act like they believe it's a crisis.**

## The Path Forward: From Coach to Authoritative Parent

Americans no longer want a motivational coach who helps them improve—they need an authoritative parent who can protect them from catastrophe while restoring their agency. This means leaders who say: **"I will fight for you, I will fight with you, and I will give you the tools to fight."** Not permanent rescue, but protection that rebuilds strength. Strong enough to keep people safe. Humble enough to serve without controlling. Wise enough to teach. Brave enough to act. When leaders fight from love with strength, fear gives way to safety, chaos to stability, and politics becomes something Americans do together again—where people can finally sleep, the social fabric begins to heal, and hope and faith in one another return.



CHAPTER 1

# LIVING INSIDE A SLOW-MOTION CATASTROPHE

***UNDERSTANDING THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE OF AMERICAN VOTERS IN 2025***

## THE RESEARCH QUESTION

# What kind of *fighter* do Americans want in their leaders?

To answer this, we first had to understand:

**How do Americans feel right now?**

We asked participants across the political spectrum to **describe the current political leadership and the state of the country**—in their own words, through their own metaphors, and by choosing video clips and images that captured their feelings.

What we found wasn't political disagreement.

It was existential terror in real time.



When Americans describe the current state of our nation, they use the language of *disaster and dread*.

“ If we don't hurry up and fix what's going on in this world, this is where we're going. We're going to go over the edge. We're going to go to a point of no return and we're going to be doomed...It is truly scary.

- Sheila, ML

”

#### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ANTICIPATORY DREAD:

The bomb is ticking. The ship is sinking but hasn't gone under. The fire burns but hasn't consumed everything. There is still time—maybe—but the momentum feels unstoppable.

This is the suffocating awareness that we are living in the "before" of a disaster story, and the "after" is coming.

# Voters currently see an America that's *in a battle against*:

## National Crisis & Decay

*Storm-tossed ships,  
Titanic sinking,  
buildings on fire*



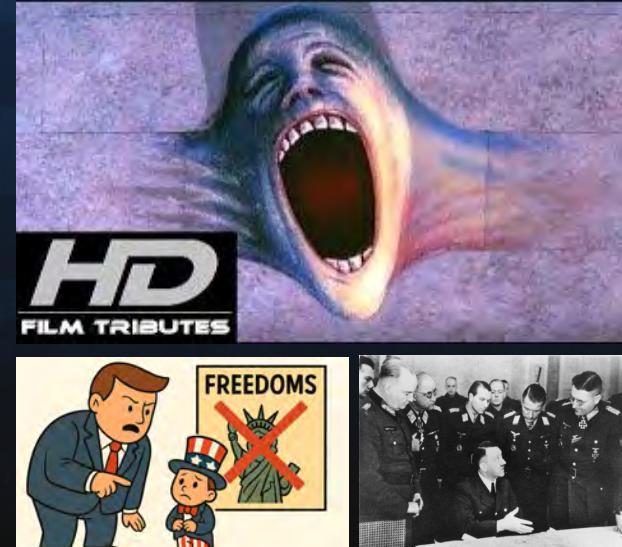
## Violence & Desensitization

*Charlie Kirk's murder,  
Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth",  
"This is America"*



## Authoritarianism & Loss of Freedom

*Pink Floyd's "Run Like Hell," references to 1984, Hitler and Kim Jong Un*



They are *feeling betrayed by both parties.*

The social contract has been *shattered.*

#### ECONOMIC BETRAYAL

Elites enrich themselves while ordinary people suffer. The system is fundamentally rigged. **Neither political party addresses this.** (Video: *Rich Men North of Richmond*)



#### MORAL BETRAYAL

Leaders deny visible crises. American ideals are corrupted by materialism, distraction, denial. Surface prosperity is hiding inequality. (Video: *Nothing to See Here*)



#### CIVIL RIGHTS BETRAYAL

Promises of equality are unfulfilled. ICE raids, racism, and xenophobia are just a continuation of historical oppression. "Why are we back in the 1960s?" (Video: *Glory*)





In the midst of this chaos, political leaders are viewed *not* as beacons of hope, but as *agents of destruction*.

- ▼ Tornadoes, dumpster fires, and time bombs with their **fuses already burning**.
- ▼ Pennywise the clown: **malicious, chaotic, performing for an audience while people die**.
- ▼ Thieves running from the scene of the crime, loot in hand, while **their followers chase breadcrumbs**.
- ▼ An entity that **deliberately covers the Statue of Liberty's ears so she cannot hear the people crying out**.
- ▼ The **forces that tear the American flag in half**, trample the Rose Garden, and steer the ship directly toward the rocks.

The destruction is not accidental—it is the point.

For some, particularly  
Trump supporters,  
*this destruction is necessary.*

They want a strong fighter  
who doesn't back down  
and will tear down a  
corrupt system.

But even here, **the language reveals anxiety**: the boxer must stay ready, must remain vigilant, because vulnerability means disaster. **Strength is not a comfort; it is a desperate requirement.**

“When someone challenges you, fire right back and challenge them. They attack you, you attack them, take no crap from anyone...[weakness] could result in a war... anyone who wants to take a stab at us would then be like, oh, well their defenses are down, they've got a weak leader, let's go for it.” - Danny, M





## The result?

*Powerlessness, fear, grief, and anger.*

- ▀ **POWERLESSNESS** — Like pieces on a chessboard where elites play games with their lives. Crushed, with hands covering their mouths, unable to express opinions without persecution.
- ▀ **FEAR** — Of authoritarianism, economic collapse, and their children's futures.
- ▀ **GRIEF** — Loss of the American Dream, fairness, justice, opportunity.
- ▀ **ANGER** — Both parties viewed as corrupt. Leaders serving donors, not constituents.

Americans in 2025 perceive themselves as trapped passengers in a vehicle speeding toward disaster, driven by leaders who are either malicious or indifferent, while the mechanisms that might stop the vehicle—voice, vote, protest, community—have been disabled or rendered ineffective.





CHAPTER 2

# FIGHTING FROM LOVE

***WHAT AMERICANS ARE REALLY ASKING FOR WHEN THEY SAY THEY WANT A "FIGHTER"***

When we asked Americans to choose images representing the kind of fighter they want, **not a single person chose weapons, warriors, or forces of destruction.**

Instead, **they chose unifiers who bridge divides, endurers who never give up, protectors who stand up for others, builders who construct a better future, and thinkers who can outsmart the game.**

Even though they're living with anticipatory dread, surrounded by chaos and violence, they're consciously rejecting the model of destruction.

**Americans want a leader who fights "for" something, not just "against" something—a fighter who is fueled by love, not anger or fear.**





## FIGHTING FROM LOVE

Americans understand that **anger will burn out and fear will exhaust you, but love can sustain the whole battle.**

### WHAT CHANGES WHEN YOU FIGHT FROM LOVE

#### FIGHTING FROM ANGER:

- Burns out quickly → **exhaustion**
- Needs enemies to destroy → **creates more conflict**
- **Zero-sum**: their loss = your win

#### FIGHTING FROM LOVE:

- **Generates energy**, doesn't deplete it → endurance for the long haul
- **Fighting FOR people** you care about → sustainable purpose
- **Sees opponents as competition that pushes you to be better** → respect, not hatred

The fuel source determines everything else. This reframes toughness itself—away from power-for-power's-sake toward values-based strength.

But **fighting from love only works when it's authentic**—and Americans can tell the difference.

When we asked Americans what kind of fighter they DON'T want, the extremes emerged clearly—and so did the balance they're craving.

People can smell performative strength and performative empathy from a mile away. But integrated leadership—holding BOTH strength AND humility, BOTH fierce AND calm—can't be faked. **The balance isn't just nicer—it's the sign that love is authentic.**

## TOO MUCH

The Bully  
(Oppressor)



The  
Dictator



The  
Chaos  
Agent



The  
Performer



The  
Stubborn  
Ideologue



## JUST RIGHT

Strong enough to stand firm without dominating others



Listens but doesn't cave; Persuades but doesn't force

The Bullied  
(Victim)

The  
Conformist



Decisive but thoughtful; Bold but not reckless

The  
Paralyzed  
(Avoidant)



Genuine with substance; Charismatic but sincere

The  
Hollow  
(Empty)



Principled but adaptable; Firm in values, open to dialogue

The  
Spineless  
Appeaser



Voters are desperately seeking *integrated leaders* who can *embody all six of these dimensions*:

**01** HAS A VISION  
*Where I'm headed*

**02** GROUNDED  
IN HUMILITY  
AND SERVICE  
*Who I am*

**03** FIERCELY  
PROTECTIVE  
*What I do*

**04** PERSISTENT  
+ RESILIENT  
*How I last*

**05** WISE,  
ACCOUNTABLE,  
+ DELIVERS  
*How I succeed*

**06** ELEVATES  
EVERY  
AMERICAN  
*What love ultimately does*

To voters, **a true fighter sees a path forward** when everyone else sees only chaos.

### WHY THIS MATTERS

In a time of chaos and dread, people desperately need to see where we're going—an obvious destination and purpose—because love without direction is just sentiment.

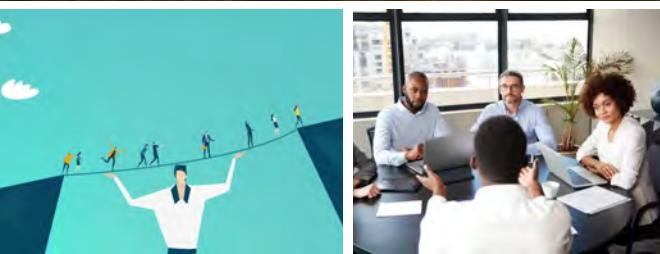
### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

Clear direction with hope and adaptation—neither rigid ideology that won't adjust nor aimless drift with no plan beyond "resist."

“Someone who is a good political fighter is going to see the big picture. **How does the decision I make today affect tomorrow?**” - Tammy, ML

“We’re not just clearing some weeds at the bottom of the mountain... **We’re building something for the long term.**” - Louis, M





## DIMENSION 2 - GROUNDED IN HUMILITY AND SERVICE

A true fighter is **grounded enough to serve** without needing to dominate.

### WHY THIS MATTERS

This is where love becomes operational—and where most leaders fail. Voters have watched authoritarians use moral certainty to justify domination and seen weak leaders abandon their values to avoid conflict. They're exhausted by both extremes and can instantly recognize the difference between leaders who lead with conviction and those who lead with ego.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

A leader with moral clarity and firm boundaries when needed, but who knows **they're there to work with you, not control you**. Strong enough to stand firm without dominating others. Humble enough to listen and collaborate without falling into people-pleasing paralysis.

**“Put aside being so selfish and help others. It would just show what a strong person they are.”** - *Mildred, MC*

**“The boss is on the bottom and he’s working for his workers... to elevate them and get them what they need to be successful.”** - *Shakeel, VL*

“Someone’s moral compass needs to be pretty insulated from the desires of the world... Having a political position is a very selfless act—**you’re fighting for what people believe in, not for yourself.** A great fighter is someone who finds a way to connect with anyone and fight for them... someone who doesn’t divide people but listens, hears them out, and truly just wants to help.” - *Shakeel, VL*



A true fighter is **fierce in protecting your dignity**, but doesn't confuse noise with power.

### WHY THIS MATTERS

Real love takes action. But there's a crucial difference between fighting FOR people and fighting to control them. Between protective strength and dominating aggression.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

Fierce enough to protect when necessary. Calm enough not to perform aggression constantly. Strong enough to fight, wise enough to know what's worth fighting for. Protective without being controlling. The calm lion who doesn't roar constantly, but will absolutely act when needed.

“

“The lion's got the teeth, but that lion's not roaring...it is relaxed... It's got that silent air about it that it's powerful. It's the king of the jungle, but it doesn't have to try to convince you of that.” - Beau, M





## DIMENSION 4 - PERSISTENT AND RESILIENT

A true fighter **shows up every day, adapts to obstacles, and never quits on you.**

### WHY THIS MATTERS

This came up again and again. Americans are exhausted seeing leaders who appear to give up at the first obstacle, but they're equally frustrated by stubborn leaders who won't adapt when strategies aren't working. In a long battle against catastrophe, they need someone with stamina for the whole fight.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

A leader who keeps showing up no matter what. Who bends but doesn't break. Who adapts strategies without abandoning principles. Who has the stamina to persist through setbacks because the fight is fueled by care, not anger. This is sustainable love—neither rigidly stubborn nor easily defeated.

“

“The honey badger... determined and tenacious... keeping away people who would destroy what they have.” - Jeff, ML

“Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee... You have to be nimble, flexible, and know when to move forward.” - Louis, M

“Rocky... is not afraid to fight and fight to get what he wants, even when the

odds are vastly against him, and that's the kind of politician Democrats need.”

- STAN, VL



# A true fighter **stays sharp, owns mistakes, and delivers fast results that improve your life.**

## WHY THIS MATTERS

People living in anticipatory dread need to see proof that someone can actually stop the disaster, not just talk about it. They need leaders who are smart enough to solve complex problems AND honest enough to admit when they're wrong. Without both, trust is impossible.

## WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

A leader wise enough to learn from experts and evidence, humble enough to admit mistakes, strategic enough to pick battles wisely. They deliver real, visible results and call out attacks with plain-spoken truth: "Here's what's not okay—and here's what we're doing about it." Weekly. With proof. No theatrics, just calm command with receipts.

“

"You need to be smart enough to know what you don't know and actually listen to advisors around you." - *Barbara, M*

"I would love a politician that just stands up and says, 'Hey, we didn't get this done... but this is what we're going to try to do.'" - *Brandon, MC*



# People living in crisis can't wait for long term plans. **Speed matters.**

- When you're in crisis, speed isn't optional. The fighter who protects you also delivers fast relief, because love demands urgency.
- Voters want leaders who can **deliver fast, visible wins that improve daily life NOW**—not just promise that things will get better in five years.

“You need someone willing to make change quickly, you have to pivot quickly. People who are not willing to make change [are]...hampered with political inertia [and] will operate under the status quo.”

*- Ella, ML*





## DIMENSION 6 - ELEVATES EVERY AMERICAN

**A true fighter lifts everyone up—even those who oppose them.**

### WHY THIS MATTERS

Voters feel the constant warfare. They remember a time when politics didn't consume everything, when you could disagree with neighbors and still be friendly. They're desperate for leaders who can end the permanent combat—not through forced conformity, but through genuine bridge-building. This is the ultimate test of whether love is real: Can you fight for ALL of us without abandoning your principles?

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

A leader who brings people together across real differences and empowers everyone to rise—not by erasing what makes us different, but by finding shared purpose. Who creates space where unity doesn't require conformity, where collaboration replaces zero-sum competition.

“Somebody who's willing to reach out... it doesn't matter what you look like, who you are, or where you come from... I'm here to support you.” - Samantha, M

# WHY FIGHTING FROM LOVE CHANGES EVERYTHING

When you love even your opponents, you rise above the fight itself. You're not trying to destroy them—you're building something bigger than both of you. **This is how you get to peace. Not through domination or surrender, but through genuine respect—even for competition.**

## THE ULTIMATE GOAL:

A country that feels safer, healthier, more stable—at home and on the world stage. Where you can go to the store and people help you. Where we can stand in line and chit chat. Where you don't have to have an opinion on everything to be an American. Where we're friendlier, more caring—like we were. Where politics stops being everything and becomes something we do together, not something that tears us apart.

## THE COMPLETE FIGHTER:

- ✓ Fueled by love, not anger or fear
- ✓ Has a vision
- ✓ Is grounded in humility and service
- ✓ Is fiercely protective
- ✓ Is resilient and persistent
- ✓ Is wise, accountable, and delivers fast results
- ✓ Elevates everyone—even opponents



CHAPTER 3

# REDEFINING STRENGTH

***WHAT AMERICANS ARE ASKING FOR AND HOW DEMOCRATS CAN EMBODY IT***

REDEFINING STRENGTH

Democrats are  
failing *the  
strength test.*

The current perception? Republicans are seen as "strong" (united, disciplined, willing to fight) but in **harmful ways**—authoritarian, cruel, destructive. Democrats are seen as kind, but weak. Neither passes the test.

But the gap for Democrats is existential: voters don't believe Democrats grasp the urgency of the crisis or have the backbone to fight back.

“

Neither party effectively serves ordinary Americans... the system rewards the wrong kind of strength and punishes the right kind.

”

# What *strength* means to voters...

Voters aren't asking for bullies. They rejected every form of dominance politics when given the choice. What they want is something Democrats should be able to deliver naturally—they want leaders who:

**Stand firm**  
in what's right  
*steadfast*

**Keep pushing**  
through setbacks  
*resilient*

**Get results**  
that improve lives  
*effective*

These aren't separate traits—they're the three expressions of real strength to voters. It's leadership that "fights for, not against."



# DEEP DIVE: STRENGTH

## TRADITIONAL VIEW OF STRENGTH AND WHY IT'S FADING

### Physical force or domination

Physical force and domination were explicitly rejected. Voters didn't choose images of warriors or weapons—they associated that with chaos and ego, not strength.

### Loudness and aggression

Read as chaos, not control

### Position, power, or hierarchy

Seen as corrupt, disconnected from service

### Endurance alone

Without purpose, it feels like stagnation

### Numbers and might

Voters don't equate strength with crowd size or follower counts. However, some did cite Republicans' grip on Congress, the White House, and parts of the judiciary as a sign of strength—not because of the numbers themselves, but because control of institutions signals real-world power.

## MODERN VIEW OF STRENGTH AND WHY IT RESONATES

### Moral Courage

Doing what's right, even when costly—conviction grounded in care.

### Composure Under Pressure

Calm mastery in chaos signals adult leadership and emotional control. This is resilience: bending but not breaking, staying grounded through chaos. Emotional steadiness under pressure is one of the most universal strength signals.

### Protective Power

Uses influence to protect and deliver for others, not control them. "Power for" vs. "power over."

### Potency & Urgency

Voters want urgency and momentum. Acting like it's a crisis, moving with energy and purpose—this is "strength in motion," not stillness.

### Focus & Follow-Through

Concentrated strength—knowing when and how to apply pressure precisely and effectively. Holding fast to what's right even under pressure—but without zealotry.

### Source of Safety

This is the "authoritative parent" archetype. Strength as safety and reassurance—"I've got this; you can rest now."

# DEEP DIVE: EFFECTIVENESS

## THE CURRENT PERCEPTION:

Neither party is seen as effective for ordinary people. Republicans *are effective* at blocking progress and achieving harmful goals. Democrats *are ineffective*, even at delivering for their own base.

The frustration is palpable: "What have you done for me lately?" Voters feel abandoned by both parties, but they're especially angry at Democrats—because at least Democrats claim to care about helping people.

## WHAT VOTERS ACTUALLY MEAN BY EFFECTIVENESS

This is the dimension where Democrats face the most urgent test. Voters didn't just want rhetoric—they wanted receipts.

- **Results and outcomes** — tangible improvements in people's lives, problems actually solved
- **Strategic achievement** — picking battles wisely and winning them, building coalition power
- **Impact beyond immediate** — lasting change, not temporary fixes that disappear
- **Accountability and follow-through** — keeping promises, actions matching rhetoric
- **People-centered delivery** — making ordinary people's lives better, not just serving donors



# THE REFRAME FOR DEMOCRATS

Democrats lose the strength narrative when they treat it as *force* instead of *fortitude*.

Strength isn't domination.

Strength is what it looks like when you care so much you *refuse to back down*. It's having the courage to *stand firm on your values*, the *urgency to deliver results* people can feel today, and the *fierce determination to protect people from harm*—all without becoming the bully you're fighting against. That's what it means to *fight from love*.

# When fighters embody true strength, *hope replaces despair.*

- People feel inspired rather than helpless, motivated to engage instead of withdrawing.
- They feel safe rather than anxious—someone has their back, adults are in charge, the constant dread subsides.
- They describe feeling proud to be American again, their values validated, their dignity restored.
- And perhaps most powerfully: unity replaces division, with Americans feeling connected to fellow citizens rather than tribal enemies.

Multiple participants note something striking: just imagining this kind of fighter makes them feel better. That's how starved they are for leadership that inspires positive rather than negative emotions.





CHAPTER 4

# THE PATH FORWARD

***BUILDING THE FIGHTER AMERICA NEEDS***



## THE COACH ERA

Voters felt more optimistic about the future, capable, and ready for growth

*"Help us improve"*

## THE PARENT ERA

Voters now feel exhausted, scared, and helpless.

*"Keep us safe"*

**THE SHIFT:** From growth to survival—but they want their agency restored, not permanently lost

## THE PATH FORWARD

They're **not looking for a loving coach anymore**—they need a **loving parent**.

### WHAT THIS SHIFT MEANS:

- ▼ The crisis has deepened and they're looking for survival, safety, and rescue from catastrophe.
- ▼ Agency has collapsed. They feel small in the face of forces beyond their control and they're looking to be shielded.

**The Goal:** Voters need a parent saying "I've got this, you can rest now"—but at the same time, restores what's been taken: their voice, their agency, their sense that they matter. Not permanent rescue, but protection that rebuilds strength.

**"I will fight for you, I will fight with you, and I will give you the tools to fight."**



“With an ambulance, it's **sounding the alarm for a reason** and it tells people what to do... it actually helps save lives. You can sound the alarm, but you also need to give people an instruction. If you're going to be like, 'oh my God, SNAP benefits are getting cut off,' you also should be giving some examples of how people can help and what people can do to survive. When you see an ambulance coming down the road and you see **everyone working together to move out of the way**, it gives you a little bit of hope for the human race. The country is the person in the ambulance... [and we need] rational, sane leaders who focus on taking **decisive action and care more about the people in our country than about hating the other side.**” - Sarah, ML

# THE URGENT MESSAGE VOTERS ARE SENDING DEMOCRATS

## "Act like you believe it's a crisis"

Democracy's crumbling, the planet's burning, families are drowning in inequality, and rights are vanishing—yet politics carries on like it's business as usual. This is an emergency, not a routine. Acting like it's normal tells people it's not that serious. Fight like everything depends on it—because it does.

## "New leadership needed"

The old guard had its run. This moment demands leaders who feel the urgency—new voices, younger, more diverse, and unafraid to fight like the future depends on it.

## "Democrats need to grow a spine"

Caution isn't courage. Avoiding conflict guarantees defeat. Winning sometimes means risking loss—standing firm even when it's uncomfortable. Conviction beats calculation.

## "Be the opposition Republicans fear"

Republicans don't fear outrage—they fear consequences. Real opposition makes extremism costly, not comfortable. Be the kind of resistance that forces them to rethink, not just reload talking points.

## "Start acting like you represent us"

Voters, volunteers, and small donors shouldn't come second to big money and consultants. Deliver for the people who actually put you in office. Be accountable to them—not insiders.

# When participants imagine the right fighter in leadership, they envision *national transformation.*

- ▼ **Government would actually work.** Legislation would pass. Gridlock would break. Problems would get solved. Citizens would re-engage because they'd see proof that democracy can deliver.
- ▼ **The social fabric would heal.** Americans would treat each other as fellow citizens rather than enemies. Toxic rhetoric would diminish.
- ▼ **Economic justice would be tangible.** Wages would rise, costs would drop, opportunity would expand. The system would serve working people instead of just elites. The American Dream would be achievable again, not a cruel joke.
- ▼ **And perhaps most telling: Americans would sleep again.** Multiple participants mention this explicitly—the return of sleep, the reduction of constant anxiety, the ability to focus on their own lives instead of political chaos. **Hope would replace despair. Politics would inspire rather than traumatize.**



1

***Fight from Love, Not Anger***

Reframe "fight" around protection, care, and moral courage—not vengeance or spectacle. The leaders who resonate most deeply defend people's dignity, not their own ego. Love generates stamina and unites people; anger burns fast and isolates. Channel righteous conviction through calm authority—showing you fight because you care deeply, not because you crave conflict. This is the renewable fuel that sustains decades of work.

2

***Lead Like the Authoritative Parent***

Americans in crisis don't want pep talks—they want adults in charge who project steady confidence. But pair protection with empowerment—restore people's agency, not dependency. This leadership archetype blends firmness, empathy, and accountability: clear boundaries, quiet strength, and visible action that rebuilds trust.

3

***Embody Integrated Strength***

Reject the extremes voters have rejected. Don't be bullies OR victims, chaos agents OR paralyzed. Be leaders who can hold paradoxical qualities: strong enough to stand firm WITHOUT dominating, humble enough to listen WITHOUT becoming spineless, decisive but thoughtful, principled but adaptable. Both extremes are failures of love. The balance—integrated wholeness—cannot be faked.

4

***Deliver Fast, Visible Results (With Receipts)***

People drowning in crisis need proof TODAY that democracy still works. Prioritize tangible wins that improve daily life RIGHT NOW—lower costs, safer communities, visible fairness. Communicate every result weekly: "Here's what's not okay—and here's what we're doing about it." Speed matters when people are in anticipatory dread. Weekly receipts beat lofty promises.

5

***Built for Decades, Fight Like It's a Crisis***

Stop treating every election as the final battle while acting like it's business as usual. Build lasting structures—state and local infrastructure, year-round organizing, leadership pipelines—that survive beyond any single cycle. When priorities fail, bring them back again and again with sustained focus. Act with the urgency of a crisis AND the persistence of a decades-long movement. **Republicans spent 50 years overturning Roe. Where's the Democratic equivalent?**

6

***Rebuild Unity Through Shared Purpose***

Americans are desperate for connection without conformity. The winning Democrat is the bridge-builder who elevates everyone—creating space where disagreement doesn't mean division. Channel strength through inclusion: fighting for all Americans, even opponents, and grounding unity in fairness, not sameness. This turns love into leadership—and makes democracy feel like a collective act again.

# APPENDIX

# Voters aren't asking for fantasy. They're asking for a standard that once existed.

When we asked voters if they've ever seen anyone in politics embody the kind of fighter they want, they described leaders who made them feel inspired and hopeful, safe and protected, united and connected.

They remembered:

- FDR fighting through Depression and WWII with vision serving ordinary people
- JFK and RFK calling people to service and shared sacrifice
- MLK's moral authority and prophetic voice for justice
- Obama making people feel seen and represented with dignity
- McCain putting country over party, defending opponents against racist attacks

People know what they want because they've experienced it. This isn't theoretical—it's remembered reality. The absence is felt as loss, like grief for leadership that once existed. But the memory also proves it's possible. It's been done before. It can be done again.



# Most voters struggle to identify current politicians who fully embody their ideal fighter. Though many offer partial or hesitant examples:

## Progressive Examples:

- **Bernie Sanders:** Consistency, fighting for working people for decades, authentic passion, unwavering principles
- **AOC (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez):** Speaks truth to power, not afraid of backlash, passionate advocacy, represents generation
- **Elizabeth Warren:** Takes on big corporations and corruption, detailed policy fighter, persistent
- **Katie Porter:** Uses facts and data as weapons, holds powerful accountable, direct communication
- **Stacey Abrams:** Fights for voting rights, resilience after losses, strategic and effective organizing
- **Gretchen Whitmer:** Stands up to extremism, protects rights, gets things done as governor
- **Gavin Newsom:** Willing to directly challenge and debate opponents, defends California values
- **Jamie Raskin:** Principled, articulate, moral clarity, fought during January 6th proceedings
- **Adam Schiff:** Stood up during Trump investigations, consistent opposition to corruption

## Moderate/Centrist Examples:

- **Pete Buttigieg:** Calm but forceful, intelligent communication, defends policies effectively in hostile environments
- **Liz Cheney:** Sacrificed career for principles, stood against her own party on January 6th
- **Adam Kinzinger:** Similar to Cheney—put country over party, spoke truth despite consequences
- **Mitt Romney:** Willing to break with party, voted to convict Trump, shows some independence

## Conservative Examples:

- **Donald Trump:** Named by some as ultimate fighter—unapologetic, doesn't back down, "fights for real Americans"
- **Ron DeSantis:** Some see as fighter for conservative values, willing to challenge "woke" culture

**Voters recalled far more failures than displays of strength. These moments define their perception of Democrats today.**

### Where Democrats Were Seen as Strong (less common)

#### Occasional leadership wins:

- Affordable Care Act passage despite fierce opposition
- Obama-era decisions: Bin Laden raid decision, Marriage equality evolution and support, Showing dignity and composure under constant racist attacks

#### Standing up to Trump:

- Impeachment proceedings, particularly House managers' presentations
- Some resistance to early Trump policies
- Women's March and resistance movement energy
- Speaking out against January 6th

#### Individual acts of courage:

- Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger (technically Republicans) on January 6th committee
- Some members speaking forcefully about injustice
- Occasional moments of clear moral stands
- Governors and state officials protecting rights and institutions

#### But even these are qualified:

- ACA passage seen as success but also as compromise that fell short
- Impeachments failed to remove Trump, felt futile
- Resistance seemed strong initially but didn't prevent Trump agenda
- State actions couldn't overcome federal failures

### Where Democrats Were Seen as Weak (dominant theme)

**Merrick Garland Supreme Court fight:** McConnell blocked nomination and Democrats did nothing effective. Seen as pivotal capitulation with lasting consequences. Established that Democrats won't fight dirty even when opponents do. Led directly to loss of Roe v. Wade. Symbolic of bringing procedural rules to power fight

**Failure to codify Roe v. Wade:** Had opportunities over decades, but didn't prioritize. Trusted in Supreme Court precedent instead of legislation. Allowed fundamental right to be stripped away. Broke promise to protect abortion rights. Left women vulnerable when court shifted.

**Weak response to January 6th:** Failure to hold Trump accountable before he left office. Delayed investigations. Garland's DOJ moving too slowly. Not treating attempted coup with urgency deserved. Trump not in prison or prevented from running again.

**2024 election decisions:** Biden staying in race too long despite concerns. Not having strong succession plan. Poor campaign strategy. Harris campaign seen as weak, ineffective messaging. Losing to Trump second time felt like ultimate failure.

**Weak messaging generally:** Constantly outmaneuvered by Republican messaging. Can't effectively counter lies and propaganda. Too focused on policy details, not emotion and story. Bringing facts to culture war. Letting Republicans define terms and narratives.

**Compromising when should stand firm:** Too quick to seek bipartisanship when Republicans won't. Negotiating down own priorities before even starting. Abandoning bold promises (student loans, public option, etc.).

**Not using power when they have it:** Failing to accomplish agenda even with presidency and Congress. Self-imposed limitations (parliamentarian, filibuster, etc.). Playing by rules opponents ignore. Timid use of executive power compared to Republicans. Inability to deliver despite promises.

**Not defending vulnerable populations:** Insufficient response to attacks on trans rights, immigrants, people of color. LGBTQ+ community feeling abandoned. Inadequate protection of voting rights. Immigration policies disappointing even under Democrats.

**Not punishing Republican extremism:** Seeming to normalize Trump and MAGA movement. Not treating threat to democracy with urgency. Continuing "business as usual" approach. Reaching across aisle to those who tried to overturn election.

# KEYS TO EMBODYING STRENGTH:

## 1. Fight Back Fiercely and Unapologetically

The days of playing nice while opponents act ruthlessly need to end. Lies, corruption, and bad behavior deserve to be called out directly and forcefully. Republican aggression should be matched with principled toughness. Names should be named and wrongdoing called out explicitly. The base is exhausted from watching leaders get steamrolled while worrying about decorum.

## 2. Start With What You Actually Want

Negotiating with oneself before the fight even begins undermines everything. Starting with a bold vision matters more than starting with some watered-down version. Some battles are worth losing to win the war. The base needs to see their leaders will actually fight for what was promised. Pre-compromise is just surrender with extra steps.

## 3. Present a United Front

Getting everyone on the same message and enforcing real discipline makes all the difference. Supporting each other publicly while hashing out differences behind closed doors projects strength. Republicans stay unified even when they disagree—there's something to learn from that. Speaking with one voice makes a movement impossible to dismiss.

## 4. Use Every Tool You Have

When in power, it should be wielded effectively and unapologetically. Executive orders, bold appointments, every tool available—all of it matters. Self-imposing limitations that opponents would never accept only creates disadvantage. Rules that benefit them can and should be changed. Governing like the position was earned sends a powerful message.

## 5. Master Messaging and Communication

Stories that appeal to emotion work better than policy details. Meeting people where they are with clear, simple language connects. Going on offense instead of constantly playing defense changes the game. Controlling the narrative means not letting Republicans define every debate.

## 6. Deliver Real Consequences and Results

Trump and insurrectionists deserve accountability with actual consequences, not just stern words. Voting rights need protection by any means necessary. Roe and other rights should be codified into law. Corporate power warrants direct confrontation. Vulnerable populations deserve active defense, not just rhetoric.

# DEEP DIVE: RESILIENCE

## THE CURRENT PERCEPTION:

Mixed and complicated. Some see Democrats as resilient—they keep fighting despite setbacks. Others see Republicans as more resilient—decades of strategic discipline, never giving up. Many see neither party showing true resilience: just reactive crisis management with no long game.

## WHAT VOTERS ACTUALLY MEAN BY RESILIENCE

Resilience isn't seen as just bouncing back. It's sustaining commitment across time, learning and adapting while staying true to purpose, maintaining hope when everything feels hopeless.

- **Perseverance through adversity** — bouncing back from defeats, not giving up after losses
- **Adaptive strength** — learning and adjusting while maintaining principles
- **Emotional stamina** — sustaining hope and energy through dark times
- **Collective endurance** — building movements and structures that last decades and outlast any single person
- **Strategic patience** — playing the long game, not just reacting to each crisis

This showed up constantly in the research: Voters want leaders who are "in it for the long haul."

# KEYS TO EMBODYING RESILIENCE:

## 1. Think in Decades, Not Just Elections

Stop treating every election like it's the final battle. Build lasting structures and institutions that survive beyond any single campaign. Invest in state and local infrastructure, create year-round movements, and develop the next generation of leaders. When you lose, learn from it and come back smarter.

## 2. Never Abandon Your Priorities

The fight doesn't end when a bill fails. If something matters—voting rights, climate action, economic justice—bring it back again and again. Keep the pressure on and keep forcing the conversation. Your base needs to see you won't give up when things get hard. Resilience means showing up every time until you win. The comparison voters made: Republicans spent 50 years overturning Roe. What have Democrats committed to with that kind of sustained focus? Where's the decade-long strategy? The infrastructure that survives individual losses?

## 3. Build From the Ground Up

Real power comes from organizing people, not running ads. Register and mobilize voters everywhere—even in red and purple areas. Build relationships year-round, not just during elections. Invest in community organizing that creates structures strong enough to outlast any individual campaign.

## 4. Learn, Adapt, and Evolve

Pay attention to what actually works instead of what you wish would work. When a strategy fails, change course. Study how your opponents win without compromising your values. Listen to your base—they'll tell you what they need if you're willing to hear it.

## 5. Elevate the Next Generation

Make space for younger, more diverse voices to step into leadership. Don't see progressive energy as a threat—channel it into action. Create pathways for new fighters to rise, then mentor them while giving them room to lead in their own way.

## 6. Keep the Vision Alive

Don't become cynical after repeated losses. Keep articulating what you're fighting for, not just what you're against. Show your supporters you still believe change is possible and democracy can work. When you model resilience and keep hope alive, you give others permission to keep fighting too.

# FOR MOST, NEITHER PARTY IS SEEN AS EFFECTIVE FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE.

## Democrats seen as ineffective even by supporters:

- Can't get agenda through even with power
- Poor at messaging and fighting back
- Too focused on process, not results
- Ineffective at countering Republican strategies
- Can't unite around clear vision
- Fail to deliver for base

## Why both fail at effectiveness:

- Gridlock prevents anything getting done
- Fighting each other, not solving problems
- Serve donors, not constituents
- All talk, little action
- Promises made, not kept
- Real problems persist or worsen under both

## Republicans seen as effective at some things:

- Blocking Democratic agenda (very effective)
- Stacking courts, changing rules
- Messaging and narrative control
- Achieving conservative goals (abortion restrictions, tax cuts for wealthy)
- Party discipline enabling legislative wins
- BUT effective at wrong things/harmful outcomes

# KEYS TO EMBODYING EFFECTIVENESS:

## 1. Deliver Results People Can Feel

Effectiveness starts with improving people's daily lives in ways they actually notice—lower healthcare costs, higher wages, cheaper childcare, good jobs. Promises made to voters need to turn into concrete accomplishments. When someone asks "what have you done for me lately?" there should be a real answer they can see or feel.

## 2. Simplify and Focus

Trying to do everything means doing nothing well. Pick key priorities and actually deliver on them. Give people a clear message about what matters—kitchen table issues they care about, not a laundry list of proposals. One major win that changes lives beats ten half-measures that go nowhere.

## 3. Fix the Fundamentals

The big things that are broken—economic inequality, unaffordable healthcare, the climate crisis, threats to rights, democracy itself—need fixing, not just talking about. Make healthcare affordable, create real opportunity, take climate action that matters, protect and expand rights, reform voting and money in politics. These aren't side projects, they're the main event.

## 4. Be Strategic, Not Just Passionate

Fight the battles that can be won and build coalitions that actually deliver. Outmaneuvering opponents matters more than out-arguing them. Good intentions don't count if execution fails. Strategic thinking means knowing when to push, when to build support, and when to use the tools available.

## 5. Stay Accountable and Transparent

Regular communication about what's being done and why builds trust. When failures happen, admitting them and explaining how to do better matters. Success should be measured by actual impact on people's lives, not bills introduced or speeches given. People respect honesty more than spin.

## 6. Transform Systems, Don't Just Tinker

The problems are too big for small solutions. Bold structural changes that address root causes beat incremental adjustments that treat symptoms. Broken systems need fundamental reform, not restoration of some imagined past. Think transformation—healthcare for all, real climate action, democracy that works for everyone—not minor tweaks around the edges.