

Candidate Resources:

Defense Against the Dark Arts: Responding to GOP Attacks



July 2026

- I. Democratic candidates are often attacked unfairly, and these attacks can have a negative effect on voters' perceptions.
- II. These attacks often try to characterize Democratic candidates as extreme and out of touch with typical voters. For example:
 - Governor Abbott has created a website, <https://www.radicaltexas.com/>, with the headline "We Can't Trust Radical Democrats".
 - A recent, widely shared Facebook post alleges that Senate Candidate James Talarico supports things like abolishing prisons, eliminating the oil and gas industry, and abolishing the Supreme Court. None of these are true.
- III. To help Democratic candidates respond to these unfair attacks, this paper provides background facts and suggested responses for some of the inaccurate attack lines that are already being used:
 1. "Socialists"
 2. "Communists" or "Marxists"
 3. "Radical"
 4. "Will explode the deficit"
 5. "Support open borders"
 6. "Pro-criminal and anti-law enforcement"
 7. "Will take away your guns"
- IV. As the campaign season progresses, new and equally unfair attacks are bound to emerge. We will update this paper as needed. Please send us any other ideas for responses, and new attacks that you experience, to info@centerforpolicyprogress.org.

1. Democratic candidates are “Socialists”

- a. **Examples:** Greg Abbott’s [website](#) uses the term "Socialist Democrats" at least four times. Donald Trump [said in 2024](#), "All we have to do is define our opponent as being a communist or a socialist or somebody who is going to destroy our country,"
- b. **Key facts:**
- Socialism is [defined as](#) an economic system "advocating collective or governmental ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods." This means replacing our current economic system (capitalism) with government or worker control.
 - Very few Democratic candidates in Texas support that. A small number may identify as "Democratic Socialists" but do not appear to support the core attribute of socialism, which is collective ownership of the means of production. (based on a review of candidate issues pages)
 - Many Democratic candidates do support things like housing affordability, increased access to health insurance, labor rights, and public transit. Republicans may call these "socialism", but they do not meet the definition of socialism.
 - Where actual socialism has been tried, [it has failed](#). This includes the Soviet Union, China under Mao, and Venezuela. In most cases these countries have reverted to a mixed economy, with private industry.
 - Countries that are sometimes referred to as "socialist", such as Sweden, [are not actually socialist](#). They have a mixed economy - capitalism, with a strong safety net and universal healthcare.
 - "Democratic Socialism" is still socialism. The Democratic Socialists of America say [on their website](#) they are "largest socialist organization in the United States."
 - The [DSA Constitution](#) says, "We are socialists because we share a vision of a humane social order based on popular control of resources and production..." This is consistent with the definition of socialism above.
- c. **Ideas for avoiding or responding to this attack**
- Don't identify yourself with the terms "Socialist" or "Democratic Socialist", unless you advocate replacing capitalism with state control.

- If you are accused of being a Socialist, explain what socialism means. If you don't support it, say that clearly.
- Remind people that **many aspects of our economy and society are state controlled, including roads, our military, police and fire protection.** Some things work better when they are managed by government, and many other things work better when they are managed by private enterprise. Most advanced countries, including the US and Sweden, have this "mixed" economy.
- Point out that many Republican policies are more “socialist” than most Democrats – e.g. taking ownership shares in US corporations, giving government handouts to big corporations.
- Then steer the discussion to more relevant issues - talk about what you do support. Things like affordability, more accountability for corporations, expanded healthcare coverage, and support for labor rights. These are all popular positions (but they are not socialism).

2. Democratic candidates are “Communists” or “Marxists”

a. **Examples:** On July 3, 2026 [Donald Trump said](#) "There is now a resurgence of the communist menace in our land...". [PBS reports](#) that “The attack of calling Democrats "Communist" or "Marxists" has been used by other Republicans as well”.

b. Key facts

- [Merriam-Webster](#) defines communism as:
 - a doctrine based on revolutionary Marxian socialism and Marxism-Leninism
 - a totalitarian system of government in which a single authoritarian party controls state-owned means of production
 - a system in which goods are owned in common and are available to all as needed
- [Only 14% of Americans say](#) they have a favorable view of communism.
- [Even Zohran Mamdani](#), one of the most far-left politicians, is not a communist. "Mamdani's platform calls for making transportation, housing and groceries more affordable, but experts say he hasn't espoused key tenets of communism, such as government takeover of industry and private property."

c. Ideas for avoiding or responding to this attack

- Be prepared to explain what communism is, and why you (and just about everyone else) don't support it.
- Then talk about economic issues that really do matter, like inflation, the deficit, etc.

3. Democratic candidates are “Radical”

a. Examples: Greg Abbott’s website - <https://www.radicaltexas.com/> - states: "WE CAN'T TRUST RADICAL DEMOCRATS".

b. Key facts

- Positions supported by most Democratic candidates are mainstream and are supported by the majority of Texans, including expanding health care access, common sense gun laws, and supporting our public schools.
- Republicans are the real “radicals”. The [2026 Republican Party Platform](#) contains a lot of extreme positions, including:
 - Eliminate gun laws, legalize armor piercing ammunition (Section 20j) (most [police organizations support bans](#) on this kind of ammunition)
 - Texas Republicans oppose same sex marriage and want to overturn the Supreme Court decision that make same sex marriage legal (Sections 207 and 209)
 - Restrict access to IVF (Section 158)
 - Ban gender affirming care for persons between the ages of 18 and 26 (Section 148)
 - The Texas Republican platform [opposes action on climate change](#). It also calls for abolition of the Environmental Protection Agency and the repeal of the Endangered Species Act. (Section 46)

c. Ideas for avoiding or responding to this attack

- Stress practical solutions to real problems, including health care access, rural hospitals, public education funding, and gun violence.
- Avoid polarizing positions and terminology, such as "Defund the Police", "Abolish ICE", "Socialism" and "Democratic Socialists".
- Turn the discussion to real issues, like gun violence or keeping rural hospitals open. Make it clear that the real radicals are Texas Republicans, who oppose

common sense solutions to real problems (such as gun violence, access to health insurance, and climate change), solutions that most Texans support.

4. Democratic candidates “Will Explode the Deficit”

a. **Examples:** Greg Abbott’s website says "Tax-and-Spend Democrats Want to California Your Texas"

b. **Key facts**

- [The Texas state budget has exploded in recent years](#), under Republican management (Republican Governor, and Republicans in the majority in the state House and Senate) - from \$215 billion in the 2018/2019 biennium to \$338 billion for the 2026/2027 biennium, **an increase of 57% in just 8 years.**
- [This mirrors the Federal experience](#) - the Federal budget deficit decreased during the Clinton, Obama and Biden administrations, and increased during the GW Bush and both Trump administrations. **Democrats reduced the deficit, Republicans increased it.**

c. **Ideas for avoiding or responding to this attack**

- Have a policy position on budget discipline.
- Discuss ways to strengthen the Texas economy and state budget, including Expanding Medicaid, which is almost completely paid by the Federal government and would strengthen our economy, encouraging clean energy jobs, and legalizing (and taxing) marijuana.
- A solid majority of Texans [support legalizing marijuana](#) for both medical and recreational purposes. This could generate [over \\$1 billion per biennium](#).

5. Democratic candidates “Support open borders”

a. **Examples:** Greg Abbott’s [website](#) refers to "Radical Democrats’ reckless open border policies"

b. **Key facts**

- [Democrats in the US House](#) supported the 2024 bipartisan border security bill. Donald Trump urged Republicans to vote against the bill, to keep border security as an open issue for the 2024 election.

- Republicans often overstate the number of undocumented immigrants that entered during the Biden administration, to dramatize the issue. For example, [JD Vance has said](#) that the Biden Administration let in 20 - 30 million people illegally, increasing the undocumented immigrant population to 30 - 50 million. However, the [best estimates are](#) that the undocumented population increased from 11 million to a peak of 14 million, an increase of about 3 million, or about one tenth of what Vance claimed.

c. Ideas for avoiding or responding to this attack

- Address Border Security and Immigration on your issues page, and express support for effective border security.
- Don't say "Abolish ICE". Instead, focus on reforming and restructuring ICE so that it focuses on its appropriate mission with adequate oversight and accountability.
- Clarify your support for comprehensive border security and immigration policies that respect human rights and support our economy. Specific facts and policy ideas are in our paper on ["Creating an Immigration Policy that Works for the US"](#).
- James Talarico has a good [position](#) on Immigration and Border Security, which includes:
 - **Pass comprehensive immigration reform:** Secure the border, make it easier to come here legally, and supercharge our economy.
 - **Focus ICE resources on improving public safety and national security:** Prioritize the deportation of criminals, gang members, and human traffickers — not our neighbors who contribute to our communities, pay taxes, and pose no threat to our safety.
 - **Hold ICE accountable for abuses:** Ban ICE agents from wearing masks or refusing to show identification and hold them accountable when they break the law.

6. Democratic candidates are “pro-criminal and anti-law enforcement”

- a. Examples:** A July 2026 Facebook post claims that James Talarico supports "Abolishing prisons" and "Releasing violent criminals".

b. Key facts

- [58% of Americans](#) say "reducing crime should be a top priority for the president and Congress to address this year."
- Violent crime rates in the US have [fallen significantly](#) in the past several decades - from 747 per 100,000 people in 1993 to 381 in 2022.
 - [It has continued to fall](#), to 359 per 100,000 in 2024 - nearly a 50% reduction since 1993.
 - these declines occurred across both Republican and Democratic administrations. [Violent crime fell more rapidly](#) during the Clinton and Obama administrations than during GW Bush or Trump's first term.
- The violent crime rate in [Texas is higher than in the US](#) (389 per 100,000 in Texas in 2024, vs. 359 for the US)

c. Ideas for avoiding or responding to this attack

- Avoid terms like "defund the police" and "abolish ICE". Those both involve an abandonment of enforcement. "Policing reform" and "reforming ICE" are more constructive.
- Voice support for the police and for border security.

7. Democratic candidates "Will take away your guns"

- a. Examples:** During his first term, [President Trump said](#) Democrats "will take away your Second Amendment."

b. Key facts

- The US has an [extremely high rate of gun deaths](#) - more than 10 times higher than most other advanced countries. (this includes murders and suicides)
- Texas gun deaths have [jumped over 50%](#) since Governor Abbott took office just 10 years ago – from 2,848 in 2014 (the year he was elected Governor) to 4,389 in 2024. On an average day, 12 Texans die from gun violence.
- Gun deaths are now the [leading cause of death for children](#) age 1 - 17.
- States with stronger gun laws tend to have lower gun deaths. The 10 most ["gun friendly" states](#) have a [gun death rate](#) more than twice as high as the 10 least gun friendly states.

c. Ideas for avoiding or responding to this attack

- Have a clear policy position, reflecting that we can reduce gun violence while respecting 2nd Amendment rights.
- Make it clear that you support 2nd Amendment rights. Point out that this is part of the Constitution (amendments are part of the Constitution), and as a representative you pledge to uphold the Constitution.
- But that does not prevent us from passing laws that can reduce gun violence. Many states already have them, and in general they have much lower gun deaths.
- And [Texans support common sense gun laws](#).
 - 89% support universal background checks
 - 88% support Red Flag laws
 - 83% support raising the age to buy a firearm to 21
 - 70% support banning the sale of assault-type rifles