

RACE-CLASS: OUR PROGRESSIVE NARRATIVE

Both economic and racial justice are core progressive priorities, but too often we discuss them as if they were separate.

On the contrary, racial and economic harms are intertwined. Wealthy elites exploit racial fears to turn working people against each other and against good government; economic pain fuels racial resentment and facilitates scapegoating, including attacks on immigrants and Muslims.

Our research demonstrates how to build a truly multi-racial progressive coalition that can win a better future for people of all races. The key for cross-racial solidarity, voter engagement, and policy victories is addressing the connections between racial divisions and economic hardship. Here, for the first time, is empirical data that support tackling racism as a divide-and-conquer tactic that creates distrust, undermines belief in government, and causes economic pain for everyone, of every color.

CORE INSIGHTS FROM OUR RESEARCH

Discuss race overtly

Our base, which includes many people of color, is deeply concerned about racism. Failing to address racial concerns or merely tacking them onto economic ones leaves our base feeling unheard and unmotivated to engage, let alone to persuade others.

Most persuadables, among them many whites, feel deep concern about race. Persuadables toggle between two contradictory orientations—one that views talking about race as necessary and desires racial fairness and progressive values; and another that considers conversations about race as problematic and pulls them toward racial resentment and conservative fears. One of those two schemas will be triggered. The notion that we must avoid race with the middle is wrong: remaining silent on this helps our opposition's toxic worldview gain primacy.

Frame racism as a tool to divide and thus harm all of us

Conservatives villainize African Americans, and increasingly Muslims and immigrants, as criminal and undeserving in order to diminish the social solidarity and support for collective action that are the foundation of a progressive agenda. Pointing out this strategic racism and tying it to the class war that wealthy reactionaries are winning helps connect the experiences of targeted people of color and the experiences of economically anxious white people. It provides a way for people of all races to understand our noxious racial environment and makes clear that white people will gain more from cross-racial solidarity than from siding with billionaires.

BASE (23%)

- Strongly concerned about bias against people of color
- Believe people of color face greater barriers than whites do
- Support our progressive policy agenda

More likely to be women, and African American and/or Latino

PERSUADABLES (59%)

- Toggle between views shared by our base or by opposition
- 72% say “focusing on and talking about race is necessary to move forward toward greater equality.” But 65% also believe “talking about race doesn't fix anything and may even make things worse.”

More likely to be men and younger, otherwise they represent the demographics of the voting public

OPPOSITION (18%)

- Think wealth is product of individual effort
- Oppose our policy agenda
- Hold African Americans and Latinos responsible for their own conditions

More likely to be older and white

Connect unity to racial justice and economic prosperity

Making division the central problem seeds desire for unity as the response, even as it leaves us vulnerable to claims that we too sow division. When calling out opponents for intentional division, we must provide frequent endorsements for coming together, including references to having done so successfully in the past. “Joining together across racial differences” to secure a better future proved effective at moving both base and persuadables toward support for key elements of our agenda.

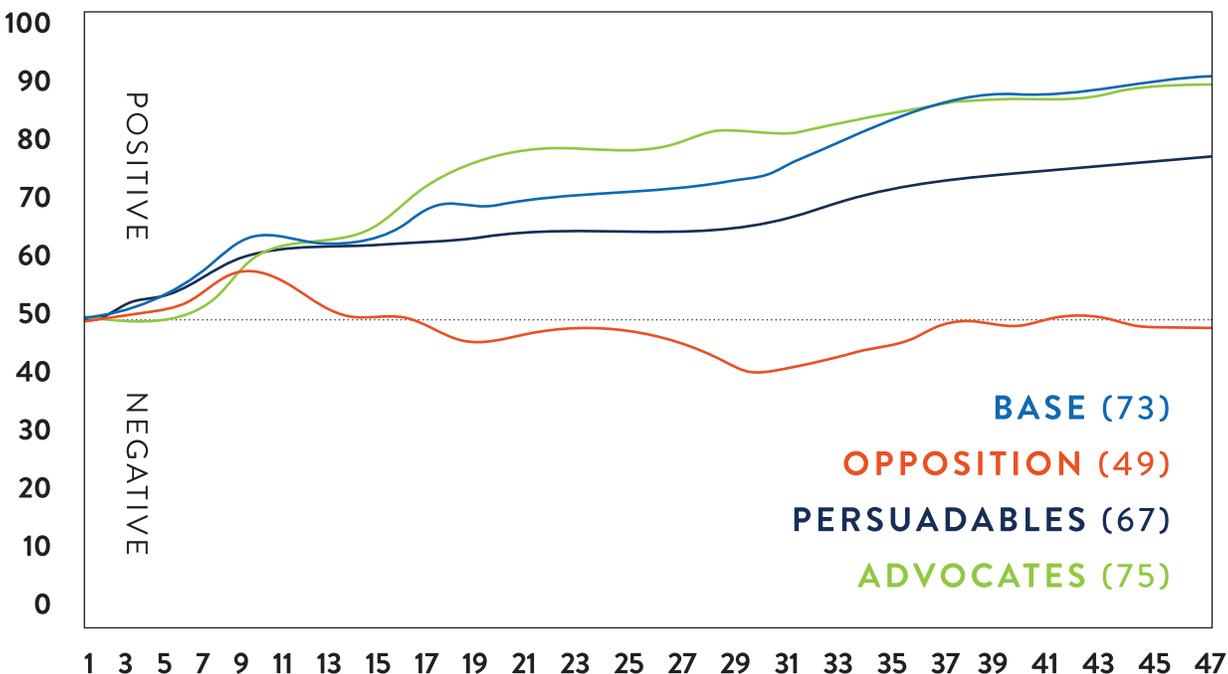
TOP-RATED NARRATIVES

Lake Research Partners, in collaboration with ASO Communications and Brilliant Corners Research and Strategy, designed and implemented this survey in March 2018. Narratives were tested online with 1,500 adults plus oversamples of 100 African Americans, 100 Latinos, 100 millennials, 100 drop-off voters, and 100 unlikely voters. The lines show the moment to moment reactions of our base, persuadables, opposition and advocates to an audio recording. People dialed positively (above 50) when they had a favorable reaction to the words, and negatively (below 50) for an unfavorable reaction. The number in parentheses represents the mean dial rating for that passage. Words in bold were especially effective. Beyond the national work profiled here, we also conducted analytic, qualitative, and quantitative research in California, Indiana, Minnesota, and Ohio.

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Working People

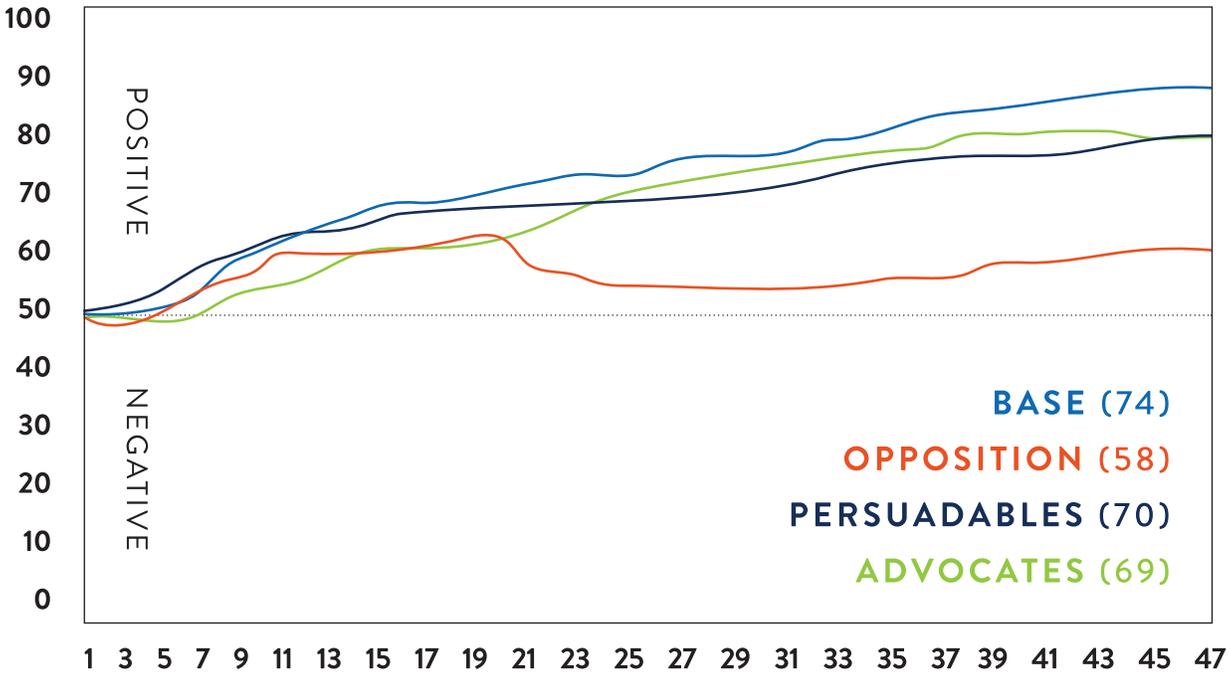
No matter where we come from or what our color, most of us work hard for our families. But today, certain politicians and their greedy lobbyists hurt everyone by handing kickbacks to the rich, defunding our schools, and threatening our seniors with cuts to Medicare and Social Security. Then they turn around and point the finger for our hard times at poor families, Black people, and new immigrants. We need to join together with people from all walks of life to fight for our future, just like we won better wages, safer workplaces, and civil rights in our past. By joining together, we can elect new leaders who work for all of us, not just the wealthy few.



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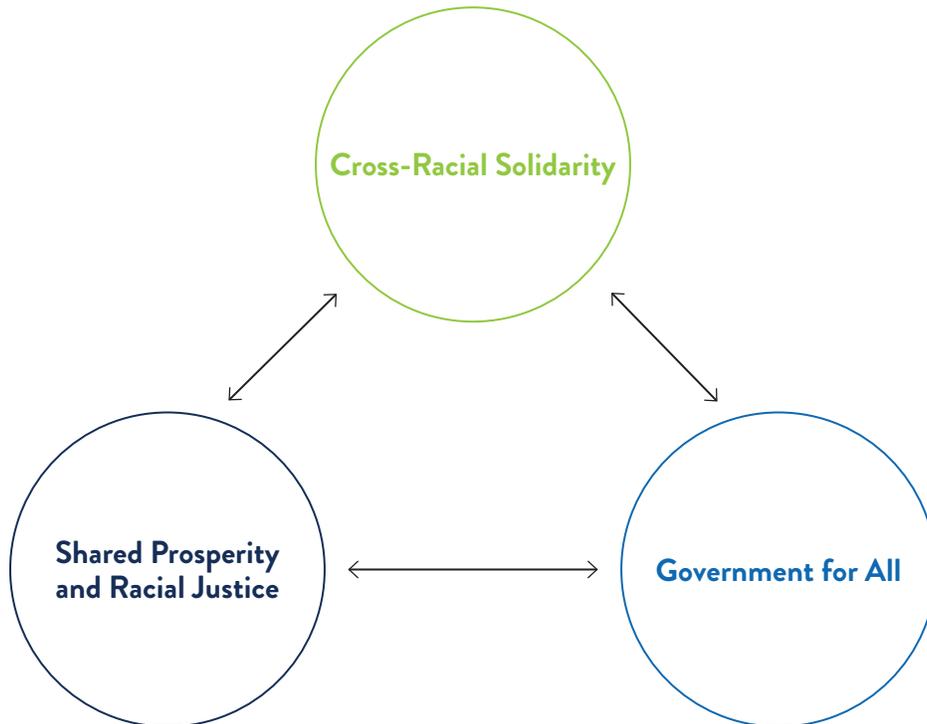
America's Strength

America's strength comes from our ability to work together — to knit together a landscape of people from different places and of different races into one nation. For this to be a place of freedom for all, we cannot let the greedy few and the politicians they pay for divide us against each other based on what someone looks like, where they come from, or how much money they have. It's time to stand up for each other and come together. It is time for us to pick leaders who reflect the very best of every kind of American. Together, we can make this a place where freedom is for everyone, no exceptions.



ANATOMY OF RACE-CLASS NARRATIVES

Core Components



Winning Narrative

No matter where we come from or what our color, most of us work hard for our families.

But today, certain politicians and their greedy lobbyists hurt everyone by handing kickbacks to the rich, de-funding our schools, and threatening our seniors with cuts to Medicare and Social Security. Then they turn around and point the finger for our hard times at poor families, Black people, and new immigrants.

We need to join together with people from all walks of life to fight for our future,

just like we won better wages, safer workplaces, and civil rights in our past.

By joining together, we can elect new leaders who work for all of us, not just the wealthy few.

Description of Elements

Discusses race overtly and as including everyone

Names racial scapegoating as a weapon that economically harms all of us

Emphasizes unity and collective action to solve problem

Invokes previous cross-racial solidarity wins to combat cynicism

Connects working together to government for all

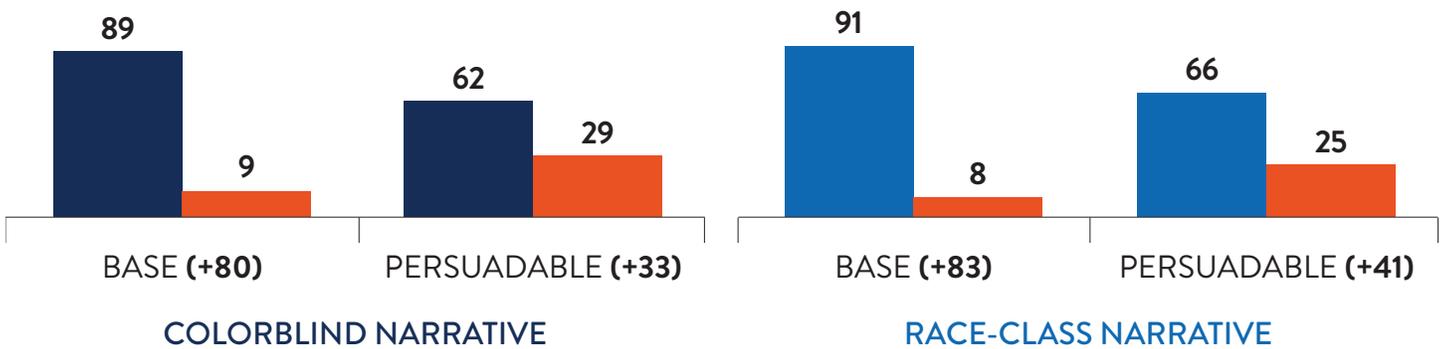
IMPACT OF RACE-CLASS NARRATIVES

Adding race improves efficacy of economic populism, and reduces support for opposition views. The following messages were tested in a split sample against an opposition message, with one colorblind version and the other expressly invoking race.

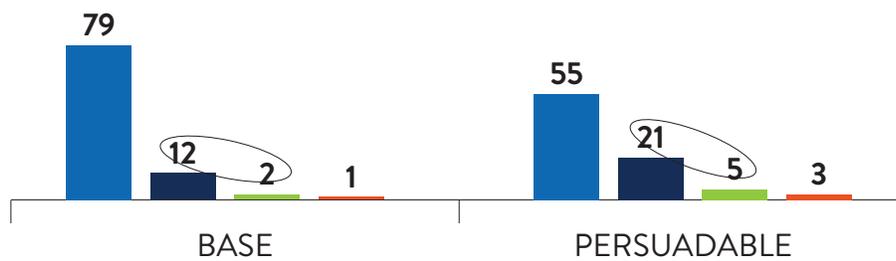
To make life better for working people we need to cut taxes, reduce regulations, and get government out of the way of business.

To make life better for working people we need to invest in education, create better paying jobs, and make healthcare more affordable for people struggling to make ends meet.

To make life better for working people we need to invest in education, create better paying jobs, and make healthcare more affordable for white, Black, and brown people struggling to make ends meet.



Hearing our narrative moves people toward wanting to “join together across racial differences”



Excited Initially and After Toward Excited Toward Not Excited Not Excited Initially Nor After

Hearing our narrative consolidates support for our policy agenda	TOWARD FAVOR	TOWARD OPPOSE
End discrimination against people of color in jobs, housing, and education	18	4
Expand medicare to ensure healthcare for all Americans	17	4
Overhaul our criminal justice systems to eliminate racial and other biases	23	6
Create a fair immigration process that keeps families together and includes a roadmap to citizenship for current immigrants	20	7
Make it easier for people to join together in union to negotiate a fair return on their work	25	5

WORDS THAT WORK

SAY THIS	INSTEAD OF	NOTES
No matter our differences, most of us want pretty similar things	United we stand, divided we fall	Overtly claiming universality can feel disingenuous in a narrative about intentional division. Focusing instead on common desires sets up a strong foundation for why intentional division is wrong.
Our opponents point the finger at Black people, new immigrants and Muslims for our hard times	Our opponents are racist against Blacks, new immigrants and Muslims	Framing scapegoating as tied to economic concerns allows audiences, including whites, to see that their well-being is tied to rejecting racial resentment.
Working people whether white, Black or brown	Working people	Making race explicit increases the enthusiasm of our base and persuades a greater number in the middle toward our solutions.
Join together across racial differences	Join together with others in your community	Both base and persuadables are concerned with racial division; express calls for racial unity, as opposed to unity in general, are critical.
Come together like we did in our past	Come together in the hopes of a better future	Referencing past cross-racial solidarity with real gains helps make future possibilities seem more realistic and worth fighting to achieve.
Divide us against each other	Pit our communities against each other	“Pit against” implies audience is complicit in the continued antagonism.
Wealthy special interests who rig the rules; greedy few	Wealthy few, powerful elites	It’s useful to name villains by what they do, not the category they occupy.

Further Information

Findings detailed here are non-partisan. We also completed separate research in key states, and in an electoral context. For further information on our process or findings from our state work, please contact RCN@demos.org. For information about partisan elements, contact RCN@demosaction.org.