

# MIDWEST RACE CLASS NARRATIVE ACTION

2020 Research Summary



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## WISCONSIN

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Racial resentment, wrapped in faux economic populism, has long proven critical to enticing white voters in the Midwest and beyond. Meanwhile people of color, young people and many women are blocked from the political process and left feeling like outsiders by narratives that stay silent on fundamental human rights or downgrade them to special interests. In response, progressive organizations in MI, MN, MO, OH, PA and WI came together to apply and extend the original Race Class Narrative (RCN) Project<sup>1</sup> in order to uncover effective ways of persuading the middle and mobilizing a justifiably disenfranchised base with a narrative rooted in race, class and gender tailored to each particular state context. This brief outlines key insights and messaging recommendations for Wisconsin based on research done there and with demographic oversamples across states.<sup>2</sup>

### Core Insights

- Effective messages follow a set order: shared value, problem, solution. In contrast, leading with problems makes our solutions seem less credible. It primes people's understandable cynicism and reluctance to get involved.
- For narratives and distinct wording choices to work, they must be heard over and over again which requires that people be willing to repeat them. Messages about enacting solutions and promoting a desirable future garner greater enthusiasm from our base and prove more persuasive to the middle than those centered on addressing problems.
- Speak about race, class and gender as interconnected: Describe the shared values that exist across these lines. Call out the ways our opposition divides us by race and gender or shames and blames particular groups in order to distract us while they hand kickbacks to the richest 1% and keep us from uniting for our economic wellbeing.
- Messages about division and scapegoating, as opposed to just financial concerns, are powerful ways to connect the targeted harms done to particular groups to the financial hardships familiar to many. However, it's vital to guard against claims that we are the ones sowing discord. We do this by first naming what we hold in

common and, when we describe our solutions, including explicit calls for cross racial solidarity to make this a place where fairness, freedom and prosperity are for all of us, no exceptions.

## Wisconsin Respondents

These respondents were grouped based on their responses to questions around worldviews toward race, wealth, and the role of government.

<b>Base</b> (26% of voters)	<b>Persuadable</b> (51% of voters)	<b>Opposition</b> (23% of voters)
<p>Strongly believe government should create opportunity</p> <p>View wealth as largely product of circumstances</p> <p>Believe people of color face greater barriers than whites</p> <p>Support our policy agenda</p>	<p>Of mixed minds on role of government, origins of wealth, benefits to talking about race</p> <p>Support our policies yet also lured by opposition on questions of race, gender and government</p>	<p>Strongly believe government should get out of the way</p> <p>Think wealth is product of individual effort</p> <p>Reject need to tackle racism and believe things have “shifted too far” on gender equity</p>

**More likely to be Democratic, under 40 and Madison residents**

**More likely to be women and Milwaukee residents, but largely mirror demographics of state**

**More likely to be men, over 65 and Republican or Independent**

## Top Rated Wisconsin Narratives<sup>3</sup>

### WISCONSIN'S STRENGTH

Wisconsin's strength comes from our ability to bring together people from different places and of different races to share our traditions and forge a better future. For this to be a place of freedom for all, we cannot let the richest 1% and certain politicians divide us based on what someone looks like, where they come from, or how much money they have. We need to join together to fight for our future, just like we won better wages, safer workplaces, and civil rights in our past. It is time for us to pick leaders who reflect the very best of every kind of Wisconsinite. Together, we can make this a place where freedom is for everyone, no exceptions.

### RACE, CLASS AND GENDER

Most of us work hard for our families, no matter what we look like or where we come from. But today, a powerful few pit us against each other, blocking our efforts to ensure a fair return on our work and paid time to care for our families, affordable childcare for our kids and quality healthcare for our loved ones – [and even restricting our rights to make decisions about our own bodies.] By joining together to rewrite the rules, we can ensure every one of us, whether we're women or men, young or old, White or Black, can care for our families, have our voices heard and our rights respected.

## Wisconsin Policy Preferences and Issue Responses

We tested different approaches to promote progressive policies and to most effectively combat opposition claims. These are our most effective messages for engaging our base and persuading the middle on these policy and issue arguments in Wisconsin.

Progressive Policies <sup>4</sup>	Base Agreement	Persuable Agreement
Protect our air, water, and land by making corporate polluters pay for the contamination they produce	96% (60% strongly)	84% (36% strongly)

Progressive Policies <sup>4</sup>	Base Agreement	Persuadable Agreement
Curb pollution and ensure we have the resources to protect our air, water, and land by taxing corporate polluters	99% (75% strongly)	79% (27% strongly)
Ensure everyone in our state can access affordable healthcare for our families by expanding BadgerCare	97% (63% strongly)	69% (24% strongly)
Bring greater fairness to our criminal justice system by ending mass incarceration and punishment for drug use and providing comprehensive training to police to curb bias	83% (44% strongly)	52% (14% strongly)
Ensure everyone in Wisconsin who drives a vehicle can be fully licensed, regardless of immigration status	70% (32% strongly)	44% (10% strongly)

<b>Rebuttals Against Opposition Claims</b>	<b>Base Agreement</b> (% agreeing with oppo. statement)	<b>Persuadable Agreement</b> (% agreeing with oppo. statement)
<b>[Immigrant Rights]</b> For America to be the 'land of the free and home of the brave' we need to respect and embrace people with the courage and tenacity to move for a better life	<b>89%</b> (9%)	<b>58%</b> (31%)
<b>[Police Reform]</b> We need to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our communities and that requires training police in de-escalation and anti-bias and ensuring they uphold their oath to protect and serve all	<b>85%</b> (15%)	<b>45%</b> (46%)
<b>[Countering Fear Mongering]</b> We need elected leaders who will reject Trump's divide and conquer tactics and put working people first, whether we're White, Black, or Brown	<b>94%</b> (4%)	<b>55%</b> (39%)
<b>[Countering Anti-government, Trickle Down Economics]</b> 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	<b>93%</b> (7%)	<b>60%</b> (27%)

## Words that Work

Embrace	Replace	Explanation
Certain politicians; a handful of CEOs; some corporations	Politicians; CEOs; corporations; the wealthy	Respondents reject absolutes, even implied ones.
[Naming villains] Richest 1%	Billionaires; Top 1%	Persuadable and base voters are more indignant about “richest 1%” but “top” unhelpfully reinforces notions of superior moral worth.
[Naming goal] Come together and make things better	Move toward greater equality	Persuadable and base voters are more motivated by explicit calls for unity and tangible improvement.
Join together for/ represent/make things better...in Wisconsin	Join together for/ represent/make things better...in America	Persuadable voters are more optimistic about and motivated for positive change at the state, not national, level.
Unions of working people	Labor unions	Despite greater familiarity of “Labor Unions,” Unions of Working People center the members and thus garner greater approval.
Ensure everyone can access affordable care	Secure affordable healthcare for our families	Including reference to “everyone” increases support for healthcare expansion.
Bring greater fairness to our criminal justice system	Improve our criminal justice system	Evoking the fairness argument retains base and persuadable voters while delineating how we contrast with our opposition’s views.

Embrace	Replace	Explanation
<p>Ensure everyone in Wisconsin who drives a vehicle can be fully licensed, regardless of immigration status</p>	<p>Ensure everyone in Wisconsin has the ability to access a driver's license regardless of their immigration status</p>	<p>Subtly reminding voters that people already drive, without explicitly referencing safety and thus activating fears, helps increase support for expanding access to licenses.</p>
<p>Curb pollution and ensure we have the resources to protect our air, water, and land by taxing corporate polluters for the contamination they produce</p>	<p>Enact a Green New Deal; Tax corporate polluters</p>	<p>A tangible argument that links desired end state – clear environment and resources – to revenue source and ties taxation to behavior we seek to mitigate is our most effective argument.</p>
<p>For America to be the 'land of the free and home of the brave' we need to respect and embrace people with the courage and tenacity to move for a better life</p>	<p>People who move here to make a better life for their families help make this a stronger, more prosperous nation</p>	<p>Tying to core values of freedom and underscoring immigrants' courage and tenacity is a more effective rebuttal to anti-immigrant claims than describing how they benefit the nation. This holds true for respondents who are immigrants themselves.</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>To make life better for working people we need to make things right for those who are being harmed the most today, especially African Americans and immigrants</p>	<p>A race class narrative approach, that builds toward cross racial solidarity, is more motivating and persuasive than one rooted in ideas of racial repair.</p>

Embrace	Replace	Explanation
Ensuring women and men are equal in our society is largely a matter of men changing how they treat the women in their lives	Ensuring women and men are equal in our society is largely a matter of women changing what they expect of men in their lives	Focusing on men's behavior and how it should evolve elicited strong agreement and more productive engagement on gender equity.

## Contact Information

Please direct any inquiries regarding this summary to [info@raceclassnarrativeaction.com](mailto:info@raceclassnarrativeaction.com)

## Endnotes

1. Race-Class Narrative Project, lead by Ian Haney López, Anat Shenker-Osorio, and Heather McGhee, 2018.
2. Present research fielded January 31 to February 25, 2020 and consists of six online state dial surveys from a voter-file matched panel (N=600 voters per state), regional oversamples of AAPI voters (N=403), Latinx voters (N=186), African American voters (N=215), and union member respondents (N=797), as well as a national survey of Spanish speaking adults (N=401).
3. Messages have been adapted from what was dial tested in order to incorporate learnings from moment to moment responses.
4. Policies and rebuttals were split-sampled in order to perform wording experiments; the more effective formulations appear here.