

MIDWEST RACE CLASS NARRATIVE ACTION

2020 Research Summary



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MICHIGAN

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) Project¹ 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 Michigan based on research done there and with demographic oversamples across states.²

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, like new immigrants, 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.

Michigan Respondents

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

Base (22% of voters)	Persuadable (53% of voters)	Opposition (25% 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 and African American

More likely to be 30-39 but otherwise mirror demographics of the state

More likely to be men, over 50, Republican or Independent and white

Top Rated Michigan Narratives

MICHIGAN'S STRENGTH³

No matter where we come from or what our color, in Michigan we come together across our differences to reinvent ourselves and overcome our challenges. For this to be a place where everyone can thrive, we cannot let billionaires and the politicians they pay for divide us against each other while handing kickbacks to the rich, defunding our schools, and threatening seniors with cuts to Medicare and Social Security. It's time to stand up for each other and come together. It is time for us to pick new leaders who reflect the very best of every kind of Michigander. Together, we can make this a place where a better future is for all of us, 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, when a powerful few fuel divisions among us, they block 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. 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.

Michigan 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 Michigan.

Progressive Policies ⁴	Base Agreement	Persuadable Agreement
Make sure we have the resources our state needs by having the wealthiest people contribute their fair share with a graduated income tax	94% (62% strongly)	71% (33% strongly)

Progressive Policies ⁴	Base Agreement	Persuadable Agreement
Protect our air, water, and land by transitioning to locally-made clean renewable energy	90% (52% strongly)	77% (29% strongly)
Ensure everyone in Michigan can care for our families by raising our minimum wage to \$15, enacting fair scheduling, and mandating paid sick time	92% (48% strongly)	62% (32% strongly)
Increase development of affordable housing and provide more short and long-term housing	85% (37% strongly)	68% (20% strongly)
Publicly fund elections to ensure policy decisions are made in the interests of 'we the people,' not just a wealthy and powerful few	83% (52% strongly)	59% (24% strongly)
Ensure everyone in Michigan who drives a vehicle can be fully licensed, regardless of immigration status	70% (32% strongly)	46% (17% strongly)

Rebuttals against opposition claims	Base Agreement (% agreeing with oppo. statement)	Persuadable Agreement (% agreeing with oppo. statement)
<p>[Countering Anti-government, Trickle Down Economics] 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>90% (8%)</p>	<p>61% (24%)</p>
<p>[Countering Fear Mongering] 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</p>	<p>87% (8%)</p>	<p>42% (38%)</p>
<p>[Immigrant Rights] 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>88% (10%)</p>	<p>50% (31%)</p>
<p>[Police Reform] 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</p>	<p>79% (18%)</p>	<p>44% (43%)</p>

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] Billionaires	Richest 1%; Top 1%	Persuadable voters are fairly equal in their disapproval of either billionaires or the richest 1% but the former as villain increases enthusiasm from base.
[Naming division] Fuel division; fueling divisions	Divide us against each other	Michigan base and persuadable voters agree more readily when we imply divisions are pre-existing and elites exacerbate them.
Join together for/ represent/make things better...in Michigan	Join together for/ represent/make things better...in America	Base voters are more optimistic about responsive government and more motivated to collective action at state level while opposition prefers national context. Michiganders have a strong sense of identity tied to re-invention and overcoming challenges.
[Naming goal] Come together and make things better	Move toward greater equality	Persuadable and base voters are more agreeable to talking about race when outcome is framed as unity and improvement.
Make sure we have the resources our state needs by having the wealthiest people contribute their fair share with a graduated income tax	Make sure the wealthiest people in our state contribute their fair share with a graduated income tax	Including reference to resources in a tax argument increases agreement from base and persuadable voters while distancing us from the opposition.

Embrace	Replace	Explanation
Publicly fund elections to ensure policy decisions are made in the interests of 'we the people,' not just a wealthy and powerful few	Publicly fund elections to curb the influence of powerful corporations and the wealthiest 1% on policy decisions	Describing the affirmative good created through public funding of elections is more engaging to base and persuadable voters.
Protect our air, water, and land by transitioning to locally-made clean renewable energy	Protect our air, water, and land by enacting the Green New Deal that transitions us to locally-made clean renewable energy	Reference to the Green New Deal diminishes enthusiasm from base voters and proves less persuasive to the middle.
Unions of working people	Labor unions	Despite greater familiarity of "Labor Unions," Unions of Working People center the members and thus garner greater approval.
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	People who move here to make a better life for their families help make this a stronger, more prosperous nation	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.
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	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	A race class narrative approach, that builds toward cross racial solidarity, is more motivating and persuasive than one rooted in ideas of racial repair.

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

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. These 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.