

THE RACE CLASS NARRATIVE



The Need for a Unifying Narrative

For years, Democrats and progressives have battled with the notion that we must focus either on flipping some middle of the road cohort or animating a progressive but as yet unengaged base. This “persuasion versus mobilization” debate has stood in as a colorblind proxy for whether we prioritize wooing white voters (which conventional wisdom insists requires holding our tongues about race) or animating Black and brown ones (which requires attending to necessarily racialized issues.) These long-held assumptions are demonstrably false and politically destructive.

First, if your words don’t spread, they don’t work. This is especially true for swing voters. Research demonstrates they hold [a range of policy preferences](#) and are relatively [more malleable thinkers](#), attracted to what feels familiar and as such “common sense.” Thus, engaging our base is required both to turn out already ideologically aligned potential voters and to generate the repetition needed for persuading conflicted ones.

Second, removing ourselves from conversations about race doesn’t make the topic disappear. Deliberate division, manifested through [racially-coded speech or imagery](#), is at the core of the right-wing strategy to turn working people against each other in order to undermine public support for government and shared prosperity—an approach deployed as Nixon’s “Southern Strategy,” cemented through Reagan’s “welfare queen,” and amplified through Trump’s entire vocabulary. A colorblind appeal for economic populism or a race-only approach cannot withstand the right’s dog whistling. To inoculate against our opposition’s narrative, we must expose the right-wing tactic of deliberate division and racialized scapegoating that keeps us from demanding the rules and resources all of us need.

Race Class Narrative is a Proven Framework

Attendant to these realities, the [Race Class Narrative](#) (RCN) is a proven messaging and organizing framework that weaves together race and class, advances our progressive worldview, and counters right-wing divide and conquer politics. RCN builds cross-racial solidarity, fueling desire for a government that serves us all and linking shared economic prosperity directly to racial justice. Research consistently shows that speaking affirmatively about race strengthens our ability to mobilize our base and persuade the middle and allows us to challenge our opposition’s worldview, but the ordering and content of our messaging matters. RCN messages follow a specific architecture drawn from broader research in political communication¹:

- 1 Open with a shared value, naming or visually depicting race and class.
- 2 Name and expose the tactics and motivations of the real culprits of our hardships, narrating how they distract, divide or scapegoat along racial lines.

¹ In shorter articulations of RCN, on social media or 15 second digital ads, not all elements of the messaging architecture may be rendered.

- 3 Emphasize unity and collective action to address the problem and implement the solution.
- 4 Deliver an aspirational vision and the tangible outcomes that we can achieve by joining together across race, place, and difference.

RCN has been empirically tested using multiple methodologies across geographies and issues. It consistently outperforms competing progressive narratives among our base (predominantly people of color, young people, unmarried women and LGBTQ people) and among voters persuadable on policy issues (who overlap significantly with “swing voters” in the partisan sense.)

- In July of 2021, Professor Nathan Kalmoe [found RCN and race plus class messages outperformed class-only](#) in persuading Democratic and lean-Dem voters with no Republican backlash. RCN messages had the added benefit of increasing self-reported intent to act.
- In 2020, a cohort of organizations across 6 battleground states conducted full survey testing. The results are [here](#) along with results from an oversample of people of color [here](#) and an original survey done in Spanish [here](#).
- A series of RCT (randomized controlled trials) [of digital ads using RCN scripts](#) (as a whole or component elements) also demonstrated these messages significantly boosted voter mobilization in the 2020 election.
- Also in 2020, People’s Action utilized an RCN closing argument as an element of their [deep canvass experiment](#) with conflicted voters, first increasing support for universal healthcare (including for undocumented people) and then moving respondents on vote choice from Trump to Biden. The research showed a critical 3.1% impact on decreasing Trump’s overall vote margin.
- Avalanche Insights has repeatedly tested RCN messaging on a range of current issues and found it effective—including [this message test](#) to “rewrite the rules” on policing in the wake of the Derek Chauvin conviction.

Organizers Have Used RCN to Win Elections

More importantly, organizers across the country have adopted RCN to win campaigns and elections, among them, we point to these examples:

- In 2018, a multiracial coalition in Minnesota came together behind an RCN-branded campaign, [Greater than Fear](#), which helped elect progressives and Democrats by strong margins up and down the ballot in the midterm elections.
- In 2020, through a project formerly called Race Class Narrative Action, now newly named [We Make the Future Action](#), over 2,000 state leaders and organizers trained in RCN launched seven statewide RCN-driven campaigns in PA, OH, MI, WI, MN, IN, and CO. These state coalitions were able to successfully implement RCN to win legislation, local races, and flip several of their states in the presidential election. The full summary of these efforts and how RCN contributed to increased votes can be seen [here](#).
- In 2020, Community Change Action/Community Change Voters worked in partnership with Way to Win to distribute [RCN-inspired ads](#) in AZ and GA, which flipped to Democrats in the presidential cycle.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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