

RACE-CLASS CALIFORNIA: OUR PROGRESSIVE NARRATIVE

Both economic and racial justice are core progressive priorities, but too often we discuss them separately.

On the contrary, racial and economic harms are intertwined, as are our desired solutions to them. Wealthy elites exploit racial fears to turn working people against each other and government; economic pain increases racial resentment and facilitates scapegoating, fueling support for punitive measures against people of color.

Our research demonstrates how to build a multi-racial progressive coalition that can create a better future for all. The key for cross-racial solidarity, policy victories, and civic engagement is bringing the connections between racial divisions and economic hardship to the fore. Our findings support tackling racism as a divide-and-conquer tactic that sows distrust, undermines belief in government, and causes hardship for everyone, of every color.

CORE INSIGHTS

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 unmotivated to engage, let alone persuade others. Meanwhile, most persuadables feel deep concern about race. They toggle between contradictory orientations—one that views talking about race as necessary and desires racial fairness and progressive values; and another that considers conversations about race problematic and pulls them toward racial resentment and conservative fears. The notion that we must avoid race with the middle is wrong: Remaining silent on race helps our opposition's toxic worldview gain primacy.

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

The right villainizes immigrants and African Americans as undeserving and even dangerous in order to diminish the social solidarity and support for collective action that form the foundation of the progressive agenda. Pointing out this strategic racism and tying it to the class war that a handful of wealthy reactionaries are waging helps connect the experiences of targeted people of color to those 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 race-baiting billionaires.

Connect unity to racial justice and economic prosperity

Making division the central problem seeds desire for unity as the response. However, it also leaves us vulnerable to claims that we too sow division. We must provide frequent endorsements for coming together, including references to having done so in the past, when calling out opponents for intentional division. "Joining together across racial differences" as a route to secure a better future moved both base and persuadables toward support for a progressive agenda.

BASE (28% OF SAMPLE)

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

More likely to be women, under 30, and African American or Latino

PERSUADABLES (52% OF SAMPLE)

- Of mixed minds on role of government, views of class, existence of racism and need to discuss race
- Support our policy agenda yet also lured by elements of conservative agenda

More likely to be under 39 and Independents

OPPOSITION (20% OF SAMPLE)

- Think wealth is product of individual effort
- Believe too much attention is paid to race
- Oppose our policy agenda
- Hold people of color responsible for their own conditions

More likely to be over 50 and white

TOP-RATED NARRATIVES

Lake Research Partners, in collaboration with ASO Communications and Brilliant Corners Research and Strategy, designed and implemented this in survey Spring 2018. Narratives were tested online with 800 adults in California, weighted to reflect demographics of state. Margin of error is +/- 3.5. Top narratives garnered highest marks in moment-to-moment dial testing, convincing ratings and share ratings from base and persuadables.

TOP TIER

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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, cutting Medicare and Social Security, and stripping working people of our rights to negotiate in union. Then they point the finger for 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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California's Strength

California's strength comes from our ability to work together—to knit together a landscape of people from different places and of different races into a whole. 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 or how much money they have. It's time to stand up for each other and come together. It is time for us to vote for leaders who see all of us as equal, whether we're white, Black or brown, who respect all of our families and who will govern for all of us.

SECOND TIER

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Come Together

California is a place where people come together from different places and different races to make a better life for ourselves. No matter our differences, we work together and teach our children to be open-minded about others, whether they're from down the street or across the globe. But now, special interests and certain politicians are re-writing the rules to line their own pockets while they deliberately distract us with fear-mongering, especially along racial, ethnic, and religious lines. We need to come together to elect new leaders who will treat each and every one of us as equals, respect all of our families, and govern for all of us.

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Future

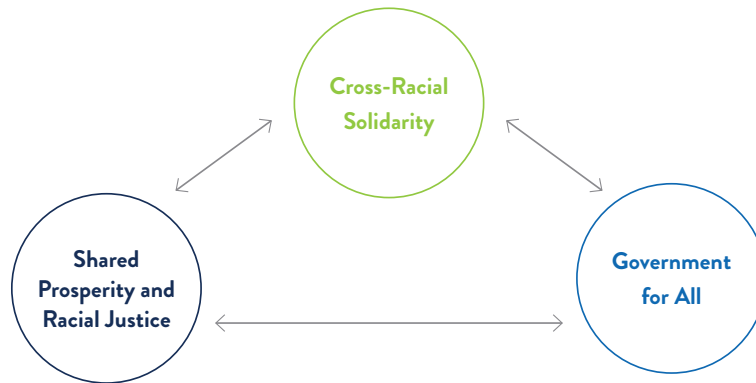
Every child, regardless of where they come from, what they look like, or where they live, deserves to pursue their dreams. But certain politicians and their greedy lobbyists are putting our children's future at risk. They rig the rules to enrich themselves, while they distract us by generating fear based on race, background and religion. Together, we have the power to pick leaders who believe in all of our children. When we come together across our different communities, we can make this a nation we're proud to leave our kids, brimming with the new ideas that come from so many different people working together, for everyone's benefit.

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Reform

“United we stand, divided we fall.” This doesn't mean we always agree. It means that when we come together, we have the power to make things better. But today, wealthy special interests and the politicians they fund divide us with fear-mongering about people based on what they look like or where they're from, while they rig the rules to benefit themselves. We must come together to demand a political system where every person has an equal say, ending corporate lobbying and pay-to-play donations. We deserve representatives that reflect who they serve—leaders who've walked in our shoes and understand our challenges. That's how we ensure our schools, our workplaces and our society enable all of us to prosper.

ELEMENTS OF RACE-CLASS NARRATIVES



WORDS THAT WORK

Say this	Instead of	Notes
Whether white, Black or brown	All people; everyone	Explicit reference to race engages and motivates audiences across races.
Join together across racial differences	Join together in our communities	Making racial reference increases interest of base and persuadables.
Wealthy special interests who rig the rules	Powerful elites; the wealthy	In naming antagonists, it's critical to specify we mean <i>certain</i> members of a group, not the whole category.
Our opponents point the finger at [group(s)]; our opponents shame and blame [group(s)]	Our opponents are racist against [group(s)]	Reframing racism as scapegoating helps draw causal link to economic concerns shared across races.
Ensure corporations pay property tax based on actual value	Close loopholes in corporate property taxes	Saying what we favor instead of what we oppose increases persuasive power and base enthusiasm.
Form alliances	Work together	"Form alliances" suggests greater permanency and power than "work together."
Come together as we have in the past	Come together in the hopes of a better future	Referencing previous cross-racial solidarity helps abate cynicism and inspire engagement.
Allow communities to stabilize the rising costs of housing for renters	Allow communities to limit how much landlords can increase rent	People prefer to engage in creating something good rather than merely diminishing something harmful.

Further Information

Non-partisan findings detailed here are for California. We also completed research nationally, in IN, MN and OH, as well as in an electoral context. For further information on our process or findings from national or other state's work please contact RCN@demos.org. For information about partisan elements contact RCN@demosaction.org.