



Messaging Guidance for Mobilizing Voters of Color around the Freedom to Vote

Topline Takeaways

- Measuring concern around racial discrimination is a useful way to segment voters of color. Voters concerned about racial discrimination are referred to as racial justice voters; voters less concerned about racial discrimination are referred to as race neutral voters.
- Racial justice and race neutral voters of color differ in their attitudes, priorities, and response to messaging.
- For racial justice voters of color, we can and should use messaging that is more explicitly race-forward, by tying voting to the historic and continued legacy of racial discrimination, highlighting the success of the civil rights movement, and using race-explicit explanations of voter suppression tactics.
- For race neutral voters and the general public at large, we should continue to use existing messaging best practices that name race, tie voting to other top of mind issues like rising prices and reproductive freedom, and frame attacks on voting rights as a way for politicians to rule in the interests of the wealthy few.
- Across the board, we need to counter the high levels of cynicism by highlighting our successes and move beyond just voting as the sole call to action.
- Using these messaging recommendations, we can move racial justice voters on perception of vote power and their willingness to wait more than an hour to vote and move race neutral voters on perception of vote power without generating any backlash.

To learn more about the research and data that supports these recommendations, you can check out the slide deck on this work [here](#).

Messaging Best Practices

Effective Existing Guidance

1 Lead with the value of the freedom to vote.

- A massive body of research indicates that freedom is the value that voters most associate with being American and resonates across a variety of issue areas, including voting rights.
 - *Example: Whatever our color, background, or zip code, in America we value our freedom.*

2 Name the villain and their intentions.

- Characterize the opposition as erecting barriers to voting in order to silence specific voices so they can hold onto more power and/or continue to rule for the wealthy few.
 - *Example: Some politicians want to silence the voices of Black, brown, young, and new Americans so they can hold onto power and continue to rule for the wealthy few.*

3 Connect voting to tangible, positive outcomes.

- Voters are not interested in voting or democracy for its own sake. They see voting as a way to have a voice and take part in key decisions that impact them.
- We can increase the salience of voting rights as an issue, which tends to poll low on the priority list, by linking it to other issues that are more top of mind for voters like reproductive freedom and rising prices or racial discrimination for most voters of color (see below).
 - *Example: We must come together across race and place to protect our freedom to vote so that we all have a say in the decisions that impact our lives, from our freedom to decide if and when to grow our families to our freedom to afford our healthcare, grocery, and gas bills.*

4 Center voters as the protagonists and sell our vision for the world.

- People are not interested in policy details or specifics. They want to know the big picture outcome.
 - *Example: We need to pass legislation that will ensure that every voter has their voice heard and their vote counted.*

5 DO NOT repeat the opposition's narrative or talking points.

- If you try to refute the opposition, you only help their cause because the human brain interprets repetition as truth and your repetition by refutation helps to solidify the opposition's message in the listener's mind.
 - *Example: Trusted election officials counted and verified every ballot to ensure that every vote was counted and every voice heard. (instead of saying: there was no voter fraud)*

Specific Additional Strategies for Voters of Color

1 Center equality as a value in addition to freedom.

- Voters of color are also very moved by the idea of freedom, but the concept of equality/justice is a close second with these voters, particularly Black voters.
 - *Example: Most of us want America to be a place where freedom, justice, and equity are for all.*

2 Demonstrate the power and success of our votes and action to combat cynicism.

- Given the high level of cynicism, messages that demonstrate the achievements of the power of communities of color tend to perform better and build a sense of voter agency and power.
- Messages that lift up the legacy and success of the Civil Rights Movement perform consistently well with voters of color.
 - *Example: Just like our ancestors rose up in the Civil Rights Movement, we are carrying on that legacy and rising up now...*
- Messages that highlight recent tangible outcomes of our votes and collective power also performed well.
 - *Example: By turning out in 2020, we showed the country what our collective power could achieve: student debt relief, new climate measures, COVID vaccines for millions, stimulus checks, and new gun safety measures.*

3 Paint a picture of voter suppression.

- While voters of color are somewhat more familiar with the idea of voter suppression than other voters, it is still helpful to describe what it looks like to best demonstrate its impact and increase salience.
- Talking about closing polling places in Black communities and criminalizing providing food and water to voters waiting in line are particularly concerning to voters of color across the board.
- Latino voters are also more concerned than other voters of color about purging voters who are suspected of not being a citizen, allowing racial targeting based on ethnicity and name.

- *Example: Some politicians are trying to silence our voices by closing polling places in Black and brown communities and making it illegal to give water to people waiting in long lines to vote.*

4 Go beyond voting as a call to action.

- Voters of color are highly resistant to the idea that voting is the solution to all of their problems and naming that as the sole call to action risks our credibility as messengers.
- Instead, we need to also include action around pressuring elected officials to pass concrete legislation to solve the problems we identify (e.g. passing the Freedom to Vote Act).
 - *Example: We are coming together to vote and pressure our leaders to pass legislation that protects our freedom to vote and ensures that every vote is counted.*

Voters of Color Are Not A Monolith: Racial Anxiety Segmentation

Voters of color are obviously not a monolith. Beyond racial group differences, there also exist attitudinal and values differences between and among different racial subgroups. In this research, we have found that how concerned voters are about racial discrimination is a predictive segmentation for voters of color when considering values, attitudes, and message effectiveness.

	Racial Justice VOC	Race Neutral VOC
Definition	Believe racial discrimination is a problem in their community	Do not believe racial discrimination is a problem in their community
Demos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Majority (56%) of voters of color ● Tend to be younger, Black, women, and college grads ● Tend to be Black and Latino women voters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A quarter (25%) of voters of color ● Tend to be more conservative, older, Latino, not college grads ● Tend to be 1st generation immigrants and Latino men
Attitudinal Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Think racism is hurting their community ● See power as equity/justice fairness ● See voter suppression as way to limit power of people of color ● Think voter suppression is hurting their community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Think racism only impacts you if you let it ● See power as economic prosperity ● See voter suppression as way for elites to protect their power ● Think voter suppression only hurts if you let it

Messaging to Racial Justice Voters of Color

Racial justice voters are responsive to messaging that is more **race-explicit** and ties voting rights to the historic and continued legacy of racial discrimination.

For racial justice voters of color (defined above), **racism and discrimination is their top issues of concern**, so we can and should talk to them about racism and in order to increase the salience of voting rights, which is a relatively low level concern.

We should proactively **name the legacy of racial discrimination** (e.g. Jim Crow segregation) and **how it continues to show up today** (e.g. censoring our history, blocking reforms that would end police brutality), including attacks on our freedom to vote. This approach was repeatedly the strongest frame for racial justice voters across a number of different messaging tests, regardless of whether it is framed in an empowerment or defiant tone.

These voters also appreciate hearing about **voter suppression tactics in a race-explicit way**, by naming the specific racial impact of these actions on specific communities.

Racial justice voters are also, luckily, **not very impacted by the opposition's narrative**. They believe strongly that unnecessary barriers to voting are a bigger issue than voter fraud, even when we present them with an opposition message.

Suggested Message

Most of us want America to be a place where freedom, justice, and equity are for all. But ever since our nation's founding, a faction has tried to suppress the power of people of color, from enslavement to Jim Crow segregation. To this day, Trump Republicans in the state legislature continue to try to censor our history, block reforms that would end police brutality, and silence our voices by closing polling places in Black and brown communities. But just like our ancestors rose up in the Civil Rights Movement, we are carrying on that legacy and rising up now by turning out in record numbers in 2022 to elect leaders that respect our voices, pass legislation to protect our freedom to vote, and deliver for our communities.

It is worth noting that these voters are **also very responsive to the universal message** we recommend for race neutral voters below that bridges to other relevant issues and incorporates class.

Messaging to Race Neutral Voters of Color

Race neutral voters are more responsive to existing messaging that bridges voting to other top of mind issues and highlights the role of class and wealthy elites.

Since race neutral voters tend to believe that racism and voter suppression only hurts you if you let it and see the world through a much more economic lens, the messaging that has already been well-tested across the field that **bridges voting rights to issues like rising prices and reproductive freedom** is the most resonant approach for these voters.

When naming voter suppression tactics, these voters also **prefer race-explicit explanations**.

These voters are **much more vulnerable to the opposition's narrative** and highlighting voter suppression as a tactic politicians are using to divide us and dilute our collective power is the most effective inoculation strategy.

The message recommended below for race neutral voters is an approach that has been found to be highly effective for the general public at large and, as mentioned above, also performs well with racial justice voters.

Suggested Message

Whatever our color, background, or zip code, in America we value our freedom to have a say in decisions that impact us, from feeling safe in our communities to affording our grocery and healthcare bills. But the same politicians that are attacking our reproductive freedom and allowing corporations to hike up our gas prices are also trying to silence our voices by closing polling places in certain communities. Scared of all that our collective power has achieved, they hope to divide and distract us so they can keep ruling for the billionaires and wealthy corporations. We must come together across race and place to vote in 2022 for new leaders who will protect our freedom to vote and pass laws that keep our children safe, allow us to decide if and when to grow our families, and make the wealthy pay what they owe.

Racial Justice VOC	Race Neutral VOC
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tie voting rights to the legacy of racial discrimination• Name Trump Republicans in the legislature as the villain• Use race-explicit explanations of voter suppression tactics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tie voting rights to other issues like rising prices and reproductive freedom• Name some politicians answering to the wealthy few as the villain• Use race-explicit explanations of

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highlight the success of the Civil Rights movement ● Include legislation as a call to action in addition to voting 	<p>voter suppression tactics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highlight successes of our collective power ● Include legislation as call to action in addition to voting
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Methodology

In the late summer 2021, SEIU and HIT Strategies set out on a multi-phase research project to understand how to mobilize voters of color around the issue of voting rights.

- Phase One consisted of a national survey (n2800) of voters of color across five battleground states (AZ, A, MI, PA, TX) with oversamples of Black, Latino, AAPI, and white voters fielded from Oct 18 - Nov 8, 2021 to establish a baseline understanding of the issue of voting rights among voters of color.
- Phase Two consisted of a series of 10 focus groups with voters of color from the same battleground states from Feb 22 - March 24, 2022 to gain a qualitative understanding of the best ways to connect voter suppression to racial discrimination.
- Phase Three brought on JG Insights to help refine the research approach and messaging strategies and consisted of:
 - an initial Grow Progress national messaging test (n3535) from June 30 - July 7, 2022 to test initial messaging directions
 - a follow up battleground state survey with voters of color (n1000) from July 20 - July 29th to test villains, proof points, and differences
 - and a final Grow Progress national messaging test (n2305) on August 12th to test refined messages against the opposition narrative.

This memo summarizes the strategic messaging guidance developed from synthesizing all of the aforementioned research by JG Insights in deep collaboration with HIT Strategies and SEIU.