

PROGRESSIVE NARRATIVE PROJECT 2018 CANDIDATE BRIEFING GUIDE

The Progressive Narrative Project is a partnership between MoveOn, SEIU, the Sierra Club, NARAL Pro-Choice America, Center for Popular Democracy Action, and the Working Families Party to conduct a comprehensive research project to understand the mood of the 2018 electorate, as well as the best ways to frame the 2018 elections to motivate and engage Independent and Democratic voters with a particular focus on the mobilization and engagement of progressive base voters. The research included focus groups, social media analysis, a national survey of independent and Democratic registered voters, as well as video, online, and field tests.

OVERVIEW

After an extensive survey process combining focus group surveys with traditional polling and online opinion research into the mood of the American electorate during the 2018 midterm elections, the Progressive Narrative Project has zeroed in on key findings as messaging recommendations for any progressive candidate running for office this year. In essence, this research has revealed a deep sense of anxiety among all voters over the deeply divided state of American politics, and intense frustration at a political and economic system stacked against everyday Americans strictly for the benefit of the wealthy and powerful, as well as the constant attacks on our communities and our freedoms by Trump and Republicans. In response to growing chaos and division voters have expressed a desire for change, namely new leadership that will protect our communities and freedoms that are under attack and work to unrig our economic system.

For example, here's one typical response from a Latinx man in Florida:

"Everything's costly, the prices, everything, food, no matter, the prices have gone up and I believe the economy is not level no matter what state you're in."

To be successful amidst this political climate, progressive candidates must speak to this visceral sense of division and frustration with the status quo, and espouse a vision for true change.

Top Messages

A plurality of voters surveyed -- 47 percent -- report being more motivated to vote than in previous years, much of that due to deep concern over the impact of Donald Trump's presidency. Out of those who are highly motivated to vote, however, 40 percent indicated they want progressive candidates need to go beyond decrying what's broken, and lay out a hopeful, forward-looking vision for a future in which things can change.

After testing which messages most deeply resonate with those base voters, as well as left-leaning voters more generally, we recommend progressive candidates build their public communications around the following themes:

Unrig the System: America Should Work for All of Us

We need a country that works for the middle class and working families, not just the wealthy and big corporations. Though unemployment may be low, the cost of living is high, and too many people are living paycheck to paycheck. Trump and Republicans in Congress are making it more difficult for working people to negotiate better wages and benefits. We need to get out and vote to elect leaders who will boldly rewrite the rules of the economy so it works for working families and the middle class again.

Directly speaking to people's lived experiences being harmed by an unfair status quo was found to be persuasive and motivating, across all demographics.

Our Communities Are Under Attack

As President, Donald Trump has relentlessly attacked Americans of all stripes -- including women, people of color, Muslims, immigrants, and LGBTQ people. Americans are under attack, yet the Republicans in Congress do nothing. We need to get out and vote this year to put new leaders in Congress who will stand up to Trump's attacks and protect our communities.

This message also worked well across all demographics, but deeply resonates with key parts of the Democratic coalition, including African-American and Latinx voters, who find it a convincing reason to vote in November.

Protect Our Freedom

America values freedom. That should mean freedom for all, not just for some. Whether it's the freedom to love who you want, the freedom of religion, the freedom to make decisions about our bodies, or the freedom to walk down the street without fear of harassment, discrimination, or even violence -- we need to get out and vote to protect these freedoms for all Americans.

Casting abortion and discrimination issues within the context of a core American value was powerful with voters across all demographics.

Conclusion

By speaking directly to the acute sense of crisis felt by many voters, progressive candidates can motivate our base and ensure a broad coalition shows up in November to place a check on the Trump administration's power. By centering our campaigns

on three basic pillars (a broken political and economic status quo, defending freedom, and the Trump administration's attacks on our communities), we can speak the language that most directly speaks to the hopes and frustrations of voters during the first major federal election of the Trump era. These are not meant to be words to be repeated verbatim, but themes that directly address real emotions that kept surfacing -- in online surveys, telephone interviews, and in-person focus groups. Building a midterm wave focused on these themes, while allowing for context-specific variations, will likely ensure the progressive movement a major victory in November.

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