



# RACE-FORWARD MESSAGING PROJECT

## INTRODUCTION

The Race-Forward Messaging Project is a new research initiative led by the African American Policy Forum and supported by a broad group of racial justice and democracy advocates. Conducted by HIT Strategies, this research assesses how race-forward messaging can successfully be used to mobilize core constituencies and support multiracial democracy. This research is designed to test two dominant narratives: first, that winning campaigns must focus their limited resources on reaching out to independent and/or undecided white voters; and second, that the outreach for this core audience must adopt only race-neutral “universal” messaging to avoid alienating any of these “persuadable” voters. In response to this conventional “wisdom,” the Race-Forward Messaging Project seeks to elevate fact over fiction and statistics over surmise. It also identifies the types of messaging that will galvanize an alternative cohort—those we have identified as “racial justice voters”—most effectively and provides strategic insights on how to maximize their collective power.

## OUR STUDY’S PREMISE

As Jesse Jackson once quipped, “an organized minority is a political majority.” Our Race-Forward Messaging Project proceeds upon that very premise. Instead of pursuing the elusive disaffected or persuadable white voter, our study flips the script to focus instead on developing the strongest possible closing appeal to voters motivated by racial justice issues so they are fired up for the sprint to the finish line in this extremely close election. Although Black eligible voters are only 14% of all voters in the US, they are 33% of those in the critical swing state of Georgia and almost one-quarter of those in North Carolina. This project demonstrates how mobilizing an organized minority with robust racial justice messages can help create a new political majority to demand a truly multiracial democracy.

## FINDINGS

After hearing the race-forward messaging in the survey, 17% of Black registered voters (“RVs”) report an increase to “strong motivation” (8, 9, or 10 out of 10) to vote in this election, including 19% of Black Gen Z, 19% of Black men 18-49 years old, 18% of Black women 50+ years old, and even 18% of Black independent voters. Given the razor-thin margins in this upcoming election, civil rights and racial justice advocates must remain laser focused on Black voter turnout, especially in those states that have enacted a range of voter suppression and voter intimidation laws to decrease Black voting power. The Race-Forward Messaging Project’s findings provide concrete insights on how best to appeal to Black voters and those most concerned about racial justice.

## RACE-FORWARD MESSAGING EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Racial justice and democracy advocates should:

- **Apply this study's findings about the strength of race-forward messaging to improve racial justice voter turnout in this year's election.**
- **Educate about the fact that racial justice voters overwhelmingly prefer messaging that uplifts a race-forward narrative and supports teaching about racism and the unfinished work of racial justice.** According to our research, by a 4-to-1 ratio, Black registered voters reject the approach either to ignore race or to "stop talking about it." Instead, they overwhelmingly believe that "**the best way to overcome racism is to acknowledge it**" and support direct conversations about racial justice.
- **Highlight the importance of educating our kids about race and racism.** Nearly all Black RVs (91%) and white liberal RVs (91%) think it is *important that schools teach about race and racism*, and 85% of Black RVs and 91% of white liberal RVs overwhelmingly agree that it is important for Americans to learn about Critical Race Theory (CRT) to understand why race-neutral practices can operate in racially discriminatory ways.
- **Motivate voters with direct calls for racial justice.** Racial justice issues were embraced across all demographics surveyed. Selecting leaders based on their experience and qualifications vs. their race and gender, defending our civil rights advances and democracy, and supporting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies were the top three out of eight messages polled across demographics. Additional guidance includes:
  - **Reject race- and gender-based attacks in political discourse**
  - **Show up to protect our civil rights and democracy**
  - **Stand up for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Programs under attack**
- **Maximize civic engagement by identifying specific racial harms in Project 2025.** General information about Project 2025 increases vote likelihood and should be a key focus in messaging campaigns to these voters. Detailing how the racism in Project 2025's policies is an intended feature, not a bug. This focus should be a leading part of messaging for these voters.
  - **Show how Project 2025's fearmongering threatens our civil rights.**
  - **Make the connection between Project 2025 and resulting racial harms.**



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