

VOTING RIGHTS MESSAGING

VOTING IS A FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENT OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

We, our ancestors and our allies, have pursued the freedom to meaningfully cast a ballot for more than a century. As we continue to fight for the right to vote and tear down discriminatory barriers to the ballot, we find ourselves with a public that believes voter fraud is a serious problem and suppression is not. Recent research from Topos Partnership and Lake Research Partners shows that the current counter-narrative from the voting rights community on fraud—one focused on the absence of fraud and suppression—is insufficient, particularly at the current moment. In order to shift the political terrain to one where we can win pro-voter policies, **we must shift how we talk about voting.**

Over half of all survey participants **believe that illegal voting occurs on a significant scale.** In dozens of person-on-the-street interviews, including a representative sample of participants from communities of color, not a single participant believed voter suppression is commonplace.

The following are recommendations to shift our language and message to focus on an aspirational vision for voter participation and create a climate where we can advance a range of pro-voter policy solutions.

INCREASING PARTICIPATION

Voters strongly support efforts to increase participation—especially communities of color and millennials. As we communicate with our audiences, it is important to include this vision for our democracy.

TALKING POINT

We believe democracy works best when eligible voters can participate. State and federal policies should uniformly protect the right to vote and promote voter participation across the United States.

WINNING MESSAGES ARE ROOTED IN SHARED VALUES

Values-based messaging proved strongest and provides a winning frame with the specific values of freedom and democracy rising to the top among multiple audiences. Fairness and equality followed closely in resonance among our target audiences.

FREEDOM & DEMOCRACY

The freedom to choose our leaders, to speak up for what we believe in, is foundational to American democracy. Restricting someone's vote is taking away their freedom.

Voting is an important responsibility and freedom, and one that should be taken seriously. Democracy works best when all citizens participate.

FAIRNESS & EQUALITY

Voting should be accessible for all citizens, no matter where they live, the color of their skin, or how much money they make. To make every vote count, we need a system that is free and fair to ensure that everyone's voice is heard.

In America, we have a system of government that is supposed to be of, by, and for the people—a democracy where everyone has an equal voice and our elected officials are accountable to us.

CHALLENGES

People don't see voter suppression taking place—the meaning of this term is unclear in its contemporary use.

Voting is perceived as an individual behavior, so when we offer systemic solutions without a values frame and a vision to increase participation, it's a mental mismatch for our audiences.

EASING VOTER CONCERNS

Because voters believe fraud exists despite the data and studies that have been conducted, **they strongly value security in our elections** and are hesitant to our messages and solutions if we do not address those concerns.

TALKING POINT

Many are concerned about our elections, and trust has been shaken. There are common-sense steps we can take to safeguard our elections and Americans' right to vote so everyone's vote gets counted.

PROVIDING PRO-VOTER SOLUTIONS

In every conversation about voting rights, it is incumbent on advocates to describe what our nation looks like when we have pro-voter policies. What solutions does your organization support and why?

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR)	Rights Restoration	Early Voting	Online and Same-Day Registration
If we're serious about protecting American democracy, we need to safeguard our elections by improving our voter registration system so it's more accurate and secure.	All people deserve a second chance. Citizens who have paid their debt to society are entitled to participate in our democracy.	Sometimes getting to the polls is impossible for people who work throughout election day or cannot find childcare. Early voting helps all voters to claim this right and responsibility.	These are common sense solutions with bipartisan support that modernize our election system and foster a fair democracy.

DOs	DON'Ts
Lead with values like freedom, equality, trust, and responsibility	Lead with fraud or suppression
Offer pro-voter solutions, describe system change needed to achieve a truly representative democracy (early voting, automatic voter registration, etc)	Talk about voting problems without offering any solutions
Lift up that our nation is better off when more Americans participate, and highlight that powerful special interests are trying to rig election rules to help politicians who favor them	Get bogged down into proving that fraud doesn't exist and that suppression is a far greater threat
Boost trust in state and local election administrators, support well-funded elections systems that can protect the right to vote AND the veracity of elections	Foment fears about voter data security and hacking, do too much hand wringing
Connect voting to specific issues tailored to your audience	Talk about voting as a siloed issue